

VOL. I(b)

In undertaking the ArtScroll Tanach Series, Mesorah Publications has embarked on what has justly been called 'the most significant and ambitious English-language Torah project in history.' The Series aims to present translations, anthologized commentaries, and philosophical perspectives on all Twenty-Four Books of the Bible. Every part of the project remains unapologetically faithful to the Rabbinic tradition that accompanied the Written Torah from Mount Sinai to the present day.

The Commentary draws upon the unlimited, priceless treasures of two thousand years of written Rabbinic literature, from the Talmud and Midrash to contemporary masters. Selections are culled and skillfully woven into a tapestry that at once illuminates every verse, every phrase, every word of the sacred text and simultaneously stimulates the reader's own thought and research. Deceptively simple yet skillfully crafted, the commentary offers the reader an unequalled breadth of insight and interpretation as he savors the richness of Torah thought and literature.

The original translation remains faithful to the 'Father of Commentators', Rashi, while attempting to

(Continued on back flap)

convey the elegance and depth of the original Hebrew in contemporary, lucid English.

The Overviews present a Hashkafa-Perspective of the subject matter by drawing upon a broad range of chassidic, mussar-ethical, and exegetical masterpieces to create a background of depth and beauty, drawing flashes of light from the verses of the Torah that illuminate both the subject matter and life itself.

The monumental multi-volume series on the Five Books of Moses were preceded by the Five Megillos — the Books of Esther, Ruth, Eichah/Lamentations, Koheles/Ecclesiastes, and Shir HaShirim/Song of Songs. The public and critical response to the five volumes was unprecedented. Never has English-language Torah literature been so eagerly snapped up or so enthusiastically received. An untapped vein of love for Torah and thirst for its knowledge has been tapped.

It is the fervent prayer and profound hope of the authors and publishers that the Mesorah/Art-Scroll edition of the Five books of Moses will be worthy of its awesome mission — to convey the Word of **HASHEM** to those who seek it.

The ArtScroll Tanach Series[®]

ספר
בראשית

Bereishis

GENESIS / A NEW TRANSLATION WITH A COMMENTARY
ANTHOLOGIZED FROM TALMUDIC, MIDRASHIC AND RABBINIC SOURCES.

Bereishis

VOL. I(b)

ויצא	VAYEITZEI
וישלח	VAYISHLACH
וישב	VAYEISHEV
מקץ	MIKEITZ
ויגש	VAYIGASH
ויחי	VAYECHI

Bereishis

GENESIS / A NEW TRANSLATION WITH A
COMMENTARY ANTHOLOGIZED FROM
TALMUDIC, MIDRASHIC AND RABBINIC SOURCES.

Published by
Me'orah Publications, Ltd

ספר בראשית

Translation and commentary by
Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz

Overviews by
Rabbi Nosson Scherman

FIRST EDITION — SIX VOLUMES
Two Impressions . . . June, 1977 - November, 1982

SECOND EDITION — COMPLETE IN TWO VOLUMES
First Impression . . . June, 1986
Second Impression . . . April, 1988

Published and Distributed by
MESORAH PUBLICATIONS, Ltd.
Brooklyn, New York 11223

Distributed in Israel by
MESORAH MAFITZIM / J. GROSSMAN
Rechov Harav Uziel 117
Jerusalem, Israel

Distributed in Europe by
J. LEHMANN HEBREW BOOKSELLERS
20 Cambridge Terrace
Gateshead
TYNE AND WEAR
England NE8 1RP

BEREISHIS / GENESIS SECTION II

Six Volume original edition © Copyright 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1988

Two Volume edition © Copyright 1986, 1988

by MESORAH PUBLICATIONS, Ltd.

1969 Coney Island Avenue / Brooklyn, N.Y. 11223 / (718) 339-1700

All rights reserved.

*This text, the new translation and commentary — including the typographic layout —
have been edited and revised as to content form and style.*

*No part of this book may be reproduced in any form
without written permission
from the copyright holder,*

*except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review
written for inclusion in magazines or newspapers.*

THE RIGHTS OF THE COPYRIGHT HOLDER WILL BE STRICTLY ENFORCED.

ISBN

Two Volume Set 0-89906-362-4 (hard cover)

Typography by CompuScribe at ArtScroll Studios, Ltd.
1969 Coney Island Avenue / Brooklyn, N.Y. 11223 / (718) 339-1700

Printed in the United States of America by Moriah Offset
Bound by Sefercraft, Inc., Brooklyn, NY



This work on Sefer Bereishis
is lovingly dedicated by the author
to the memory of his mother

הרבנית פרומא בת ר' חיים צבי ע"ה

ע"ה Rebetzin Fannie Zlotowitz

נפ' יב טבת תשמ"ה

Like multitudes of Jews, she and her husband came to America
in the days of steerage and tenements, over half a century ago.
But unlike most, they held fast to their roots.
Her pride was her husband, the gaon, שלי"טא,
who plumbed undisturbed the depths of Talmudic wisdom.
She inspired him in his learning and his commitment
to maintain the highest standards of rabbinical service.
Together they helped prepare the American soil
for today's lush crop of Torah scholars and communities.
Her ambition was that her children grow up
to bring pride to her forebears.
Her duty was to help the institutions and individuals who depended
on her warm heart and respected leadership.
She succeeded as did few others.
Wise, devoted, noble and kind;
she was the quintessential Jewish matriarch.
And the vineyard she planted will honor her memory
for generations to come.

תנצב"ה

מכתב ברכה

משה פיינשטיין

ר"מ תפארת ירושלים

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

455 F. D. R. Drive

New York, N. Y. 10002

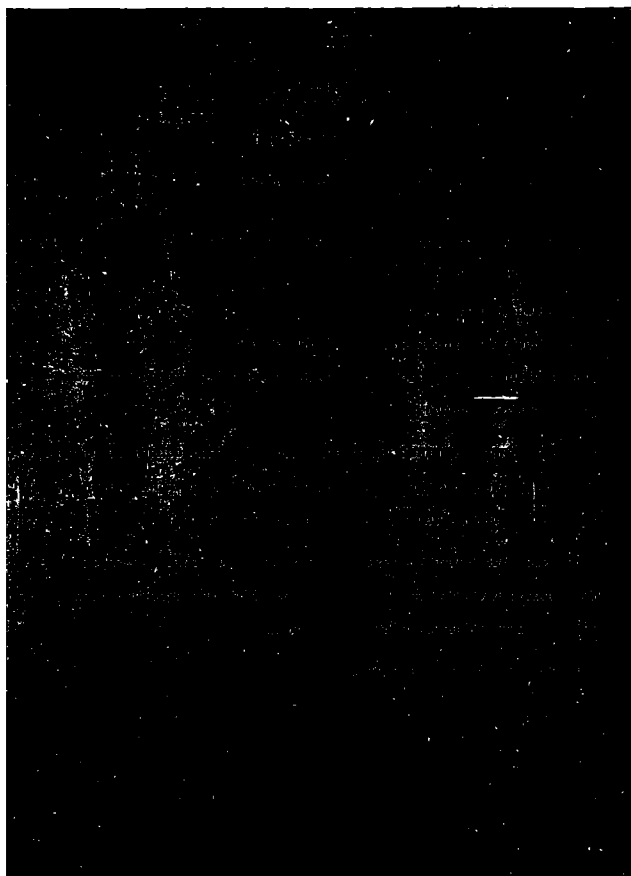
בע"ח

הנה ידידי הרב הנכבד מאוד מהור"ר מאיר יעקב בן ידידי
הרב הגאון ר' אהרן זלאסאוויץ שליט"א כבר נתפרסם בספריו
על חכש מגילות, ספר יונה, ופרשיות בראשית בשפה האנגלית
המרוברת פה במדינה, אשר קבץ פנינים יקרים ורעיונות
נשגבים מספרי חז"ל ורבותינו הראשונים והאחרונים ו"ל
המקוררים לאוהבת החורה וקיום המצוות ומחזיקים האמונה
בהשי"ת, ויש בזה חזקת גדול לקרב לב החוקים לאבינו
שבשמים, וגם ראה חיבוריו בני הרה"ג ר' דוד שליט"א וגם
חיבורו הנוכחי ושבחוהו מאד שנלקט ונסדר בטוב טעם, וזה
ביאור חשוב על המקרא. ועכשיו מברך על המוגמר שסיים ספר
בראשית אשר על כן דבר טוב הוא שמדפיסו ומוציאו לאור
עולם להגדיל אהבת השי"ת ותורתו הקדושה והאמונה הסתורה
ולעורר על קיום המצוות. ואני מכרכו שבזכות הרבצת התורה
יתן השי"ת רפוא"ש ואריכת ימים לאביו הרה"ג שליט"א ולאמו
חתי' עמו"ש, ויתן לו השי"ת נחת סבניו יחי' וכל ב"ב,
ושיהיה לו כח ומנוחה הנפש להמשיך הלאה בעבודת ה' לפרש
ולסיים גם ספר שמות וכל ספרי התנ"ך ועוד ספרים חשובים
אשר מציאים לאור חברת ארטסקרול שהוא תחת הנהלתו, שזה
לתועלת גדול להרבה אינשי, שהוא ממזכי הדבים, וזכותו
גדול.

וגם אני מברך את ידידי הרב הנכבד מהור"ר נתן שערמאן
שליט"א אשר הוסיף פתיחה חשובה לכל סדרה בענינים
חשובים מהושכין את הלב לתורה ויראת השי"ת שיצליח מאד
בכל מעשיו ובפרט בעבודת הקודש אשר עוסק בזה בכל כחו
לקרש שם שמים.

וע"ז, בעה"ח זצ"ל י"ט.
חתי' משה פיינשטיין

מכתב ברכה



מכתב ברכה

RABBI JACOB I. RUDERMAN
400 MT. WILSON LANE
BALTIMORE, MD. 21208

יעקב יצחק הלוי רודמן
באלטימאר, מר.

יום שהוכפל בו כי טוב
כ"ג למסמונים, תשמ"א

כבוד הרבנים החשובים
מבצי חורה למופת
הרב מאיר יעקב זלסאווין שליט"א
והרב נתן שרמאן שליט"א,

בקשה ממני לכחוב מכתב ברכה לכבוד החבור שהנכם מסיימים
בו הפירוש לחומש בראשית, והנני קורא על הזדמנות זו
"דבר בעתו מה טוב". הלא בימים אלו שכל ישראל מכין את
עצמו לקבלת החורה באה ברכה על גמרה של חורה ממעמקים.
ובפרט כשגמר זה אינו אלא התחלה להמשיך עבודתכם בקודש
לקרב לבוח אחינו בני ישראל לחורה ולתעודה. והנני אוחז
בזה מנהגו של אביי באמרו (שבח קיח:) דכי חזינא צורכא
מרבנן דשלים מסכתא עבידנא יומא טבא לרבנן, והנני משתחף
כשמחכים ומברך אחכם שחלבו מחיל אל חיל ויפוצו סעירותיכם
חוצה להגדיל חורה ולהאדירה.

החותם לכבוד החורה ולומדיה,



0. 750000

Rabbi Aron Glotowitz

CONGRESSION ST/ CHAIRMAN/ SEN/ CLERK
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

RESIDENT
1134 EAST 98 STREET
BROOKLYN, NY 11238
(212) 252-9181

[illegible]

הנהגת כבוד והערכה יסודית של החוקרים
אשר הם בור' ויחד חידושם בפניו רצון'
שלא לשלול דאגה-חברתית דוגמת הדברים.



Table of Contents

Author's Preface and Acknowledgments

סדר ויצאָלֵי/Sidrah Vayeitzei

Overviews:	<i>Jacob: Vision and Exile</i>	1177
	<i>Jacob, Rachel and Leah</i>	1190
	<i>A Tzaddik and His Possessions</i>	1205
The Sidrah:	Jacob's flight to Charan/ His dream at Bethel	1216
	Jacob's material possessions	1218
	The symbolism of Jacob's dream	1224
	The site of the dream	1238
	Permissibility of the pillar	1242
	Jacob's vow	1245
	Jacob meets Rachel	1251
	Laban invites Jacob to reside with him	1263
	Jacob's voluntary separation from his parents	1267
	Leah is married to Jacob	1272
	A new arrangement is made for Rachel	1277
	The birth of the tribes	1282
	Jacob marries Bilhah	1289
	Jacob marries Zilpah	1297
	The <i>dudaim</i>	1300
	The pronunciation of 'Yissachar'	1307
	Rachel conceives; the birth of Joseph	1310
	Jacob's children: A chronology	1312
	Jacob wishes to depart./	
	A new agreement is concluded with Laban	1313
	Jacob's wages	1318
	The peeled rods	1325
	Summary: The validity of Jacob's actions	1331
	Jacob's decision to depart for Charan	1333
	HASHEM commands Jacob to depart	1334
	Jacob's flight from Laban	1344
	<i>Teraphim</i>	1347
	Laban proposes a treaty	1372
	Machanaim	1383

וישילח/Sidrah Vayishlach

Overviews:	<i>Jacob—Alone and Secure</i>	1387
	<i>Torah—Satan's objective</i>	1397

The Sidrah:	Jacob dispatches angels to Esau	1406
	Why did Jacob risk rekindling old hatred	
	by initiating this contact?	1407
Prophetic promises and forfeiture by sin/A synopsis		1415
	Military preparations	1418
	Prayer	1420
	A tribute is prepared	1426
	Jacob moves his encampment	1434
	The struggle with the Angel	1436
	Jacob is informed that his name will be	
	changed to Israel	1441
	The prohibition of eating the tendon of an	
	animal's thigh [<i>Gid HaNasheh</i>]	1445
	The encounter between Jacob and Esau	1447
	Jacob in Succoth	1462
	Jacob in Shechem	1464
	The abduction of Dinah	1469
	Thee collective responsibility of the people	
	of Shechem./The seven Noachide laws	1480
	Simeon and Levi decimate Shechem	1488
	Jacob journeys to Bethel	1497
	The death of Rebecca and Deborah	1505
	Rebecca's age at her death	1507
	Jacob is formally named Israel	1509
	God ratifies the earlier blessings	1510
	Jacob fulfills his vow	1514
	The birth of Benjamin and death of Rachel	1515
	The Tomb of Rachel	1520
	Reuben's incident with Bilhah	1521
	Jacob reunites with his father	1527
	The death of Isaac	1528
	The Chronicles of Esau	1531
<i>Table:</i>	The Edomite/Seirite Genealogies	1535
	Esau separates himself from Jacob	1537
	The Seirite genealogy	1545
	The Horite chiefs	1551
	The Edomite kings	1551
	The chiefs following the Edomite monarchy	1556

סדר וישב / Sidrah Vayeishev

Overviews:	<i>Joseph and His Brothers</i>	1563
..	<i>Joseph and Potiphar's Wife</i>	1584
	<i>Dreams—Prophetic and Pointless</i>	1593
	<i>And He Was a Youth</i>	1600
 The Sidrah:	 The chronicles of Jacob and his offspring	 1606
	Joseph and his relations with his brothers/	
	The seeds of the Egyptian Bondage	1608
	Joseph's dream	1620
	The sale of Joseph	1628
	Reuben reacts	1639
	Judah's proposal	1647
	Who sold Joseph?	1650
	The brothers prepare an alibi	1657
	The identity of Jacob's daughter-in-law	1661
	Judah and Tamar/	
	The roots of the Messiah and the Israelite monarchy	1666
	Er and Onan	1671
	Judah rebuffs Tamar	1677
	Tamar disguises herself as a harlot	1681
	The moral perspective of Judah's action	1684
	Judah is informed of Tamar's 'trespass'	1690
	'She is more righteous than I!'	1693
	Tamar bears twins: Peretz and Zerach	1695
	Joseph in Egypt	1698
	Potiphar's wife makes unwelcome advances	
	to Joseph which he repels	1706
	Joseph is slandered and imprisoned	1713
	Joseph interprets dreams in prison	1722
	The dreams of the chamberlains	1726
	The interpretation	1732
	Joseph asks the cupbearer to intercede on his behalf	1734
	Pharaoh's birthday feast. The fulfillment	
	of the interpretation	1741

סדר מקץ / Sidrah Mikeitz

An Overview:	<i>Faith and Trust</i>	1746
The Sidrah:	Pharaoh's dream	1758
The Chamberlain of the Cupbearers 'remembers' Joseph		1767
Pharaoh relates his dream to Joseph		1772
[Chart:] Pharaoh's Dream / Variations and Nuances		1774
Joseph's interpretation		1780
Joseph's plan		1785
Joseph is appointed viceroy of Egypt		1791
The seven years of abundance		1802
Joseph's children: Manasseh and Ephraim /		
Abstention from conjugal relations in time of famine		1805
The onset of the famine		1811
Joseph's purpose in demanding that the Egyptians		
undergo circumcision		1813
The brothers in Egypt		1817
Their report to their father		1849
The brothers return to Egypt		1857
Joseph's letter to the viceroy of Egypt		1870
Joseph sees Benjamin and tests his brothers' sincerity		1871
The meal with Joseph		1884
The final test: Benjamin is accused of thievery		1888

סדר ויגש / Sidrah Vayigash

An Overview:	<i>Judah and Joseph</i>	1905
The Sidrah:	Judah intercedes	1946
	Variations in the recapitulation	1948
	Joseph identifies himself	1958
	'I am Joseph! Does my father still live?'	1960
	Weeping over the destruction of the future Temples	1974
	'Do not become agitated on the Way'/	
	The halachic dilemma	1984
	Jacob is informed Joseph is alive	1985
	Wagons —the sign of the Eglah Arufah	1988
	Jacob undertakes the journey to Joseph	1993
	God grants Jacob permission to migrate to Egypt	1996
	Onkelos' principle of translating corporeal terms	2000
	List of the descendants to Egypt	2006
	The birth of Yocheved — the unnamed descendant	2011
	Chart: <i>The 70 who descended to Egypt</i>	2021
	Joseph reunites with Jacob	2024
	Joseph ensures his family's settlement in Goshen	2028
	The patriarchal occupation	2030
	Joseph's report to Pharaoh / Variations in the dialogue	2033
	Joseph presents Jacob to Pharaoh	2042
	Joseph's agrarian policy	2044
	The famine ends	2048
	Joseph demands a fifth of all the produce for Pharaoh	2055

סדר ויחי / Sidrah Vayechi

An Overview	<i>In Egypt and for All Time</i>	2063
The Sidrah:	Vayechi — the "closed" section	2084
	Jacob requests burial in Eretz Yisrael	2086
	Jacob's illness	2094
	The birthright is transferred to Joseph	2096

The territorial effects of Manasseh and Ephraim's	
elevation to the status of Tribes	2099
Jacob blesses his twelve sons	2130
The origin of the Shema	2132
Torah source for the belief in the Messiah	2152
Zebulun precedes Issachar	2158
Jacob's final command	2190
The death of Leah	2193
Jacob 'dies'	2194
The burial procession	2203
Map: <i>Goren HaAtad—'Across the Jordan'</i>	2207
The death of Esau at the Cave of Machpelah	2216
Joseph's brothers fear his retribution	2214
Joseph adjures his brothers to bury him in Eretz Yisrael	2224
The words 'Pakod Yifkod' identify the Redeemer	2226
The death of Joseph	2229

PRÉFACE TO THE FINAL VOLUME OF THE ORIGINAL SIX-VOLUME EDITION

ברוך שהחיינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה

It is with special feelings of humility and joyous gratitude to the Ribono Shel Olam that we present this, the sixth and last volume of the ArtScroll BEREISHIS, to the Torah-learning public.

The volume culminates the first plateau in the ongoing commentary to the Chumash, which I have the z'chus to write in association with Reb Nosson — the selection and preparation of the commentary being done by me, and the editing as well as the beautiful and stimulating Overviews prepared by him. It also marks the twelfth sefer which we have done together, and the forty-fifth in the ArtScroll Series ב"י.

What began nearly six years ago with a volume on Megillas Esther written as a memorial to a dear friend, Reb Mair Fogel ע"ה, has ב"ה emerged into a major vehicle for disseminating Torah to the English-speaking world; a project deemed worthy of endorsement by the major Roshei Yeshivah and Gedolei Yisroel שליט"א, among them: MARAN HAGAON R' MOSHE FEINSTEIN, MARAN HAGAON R' YAAKOV KAMENETZKY, MARAN HAGAON R' YAAKOV YITZCHAK HALEVI RUDERMAN, MARAN HAGAON R' MORDECHAI GIFTER, MARAN HAGAON R' SHNEUR KOTLER, and להבחי"ח MARAN HAGAON R' GEDALIAH SCHORR זצ"ל. They who bear much of the burden of Jewish survival, and whose wisdom defines the means by which the nation of Torah sustains itself, have seen fit to give their approval, encouragement, time, and guidance to our work. They have graciously described the ArtScroll Series as one of the great contributions to the world of Torah, and we accept the heavy responsibility of being worthy of their confidence.

Baruch Hashem, the series as a whole has attracted authors from the front ranks of English-speaking Torah-scholars and thinkers. Thanks to their participation, it has branched out from the Five Megillos and Chumash to many other areas. The series now includes works on Tanach, Mishnah — with one of the broadest anthologized commentaries ever produced, YAD AVRAHAM — in memory of Avraham Yosef Glick ע"ה — under the patronage of MR. AND MRS. LOUIS GLICK שיחי; the liturgy; Judaica classics; biographies, and even a new Youth Series. The impact of the Series has been profound, and we thank the Ribono Shel Olam for allowing us to be a conduit for spreading His Word to those who thirst for it.

Work has already begun on *Sefer Shemos*, and is steadily progressing on the *Siddur*. In addition, the next year should אי"ה see the publication of *Yehoshua*; the balance of *Tehillim*; *Mishnayos Shabbos*, *Eruvin* and *Beitzah* — thereby completing *Seder Moed*; *Mishnah Yevamos* in *Seder Nashim*; the final volumes of R' Zevin's *Festivals in Halachah and Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Festivals*; *Ezra*; *Nechemiah*; a treasury of *Biographies of Rishonim and Acharonim*; and the first volume of *Divrei HaYamim* and of *I Shmuel*. An ambitious program, indeed; one that will require סייעתא רשמיא and great team effort to accomplish. But if our work can continue to make Torah study the province of English-speaking Jews — authentic, unalloyed Torah, as our Sages understood Hashem's Word, without watering down by non-traditional sources — then the thousands of hours invested will have been fully justified.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At this joyous time of fulfillment — the *Siyum* of *Sefer Bereishis* — I wish again to emphasize that if this work is in any way worthy of the reader's attention, it is because I have the honor of benefiting from the friendship and personal counsel of some of the most scholarly and intellectually gifted personalities on the contemporary Torah scene. I am deeply indebted to:

My father HARAV HAGAON ARON ZLOTOWITZ שליט"א, of whose erudition and scholarship I have always stood in awe. He has discussed significant portions of the work with me and allowed me to benefit from his wisdom and hashkafah. May my dear mother הרבנית פרומא בת רפואה שלמה be granted אסתר גיטל תחי' so that they can resume their active lives together and enjoy much nachas from their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren עזר מאה ועשרים שנה.

I wish especially to record my warmest gratitude to רבי ומורי HARAV HAGAON R' DAVID FEINSTEIN שליט"א, a self-effacing gaon of encyclopedic knowledge, who has given of himself and his sage counsel tirelessly and enthusiastically. He has generously torn days from his busy schedule to read the manuscript, note discrepancies, clarify difficult concepts, and point out new material and insights. More than once has saved me an embarrassing error, and has guided me to insights I might never have known without him. He has made himself totally available on every and any occasion to discuss a fine point in p'shat, and has sharply honed my sensitivity in areas of exegesis and presentation. His warm concern and encouragement have pervaded this entire undertaking. Words do not suffice to convey my feelings of gratitude and admiration.

Similarly, my profound mentor, HARAV HAGAON R' DAVID COHEN שליט"א, a rare blend of phenomenal breadth of knowledge and clarity of thought, has always made himself totally available — far beyond the bounds of friendship — to discuss and investigate concepts and approaches of the material prior to publication. It was Reb David who, many years ago, inspired in me a profound love for sefarim and meticulous research.

Both HARAV FEINSTEIN and HARAV COHEN encouraged this work at times of great frustration, and much of the z'chus of the ArtScroll publications must be credited to them. Though their comments are frequently quoted throughout the commentary and Overviews, their influence pervades the work far out of proportion to the times they are mentioned by name. The positive aspects of the work bears their imprint; the shortcomings are my own.

Additionally, I must express gratitude to a group of distinguished leaders whose personal support and encouragement have been immeasurably important: R' MOSHE SHERER, R' MICHAEL L. MUNK, R' JOSEPH ELIAS, R' PINCHAS STOLPER, R' BORUCH B. BORCHARDT, MR. DAVID H. SCHWARTZ, MR. AARON L. HEIMOWITZ.

My colleagues, co-workers — and friends — at Mesorah Publications, RABBI AVIE GOLD and MR. STEPHEN BLITZ, each in his respective role, exemplifies the very high standards we have set for ourselves — Avie in the literary area, and Steve in the organizational and developmental areas. Their loyal professional efforts, cheerfully expended, are gratefully appreciated and are very important in the success of the Series. Moreover, the office and production staff — YOSEF TIMINSKY, my sister MRS. SHIRLEY KIFFEL, MRS. FAIGIE WEINBAUM, LEA FREIER, CHANEE FREIER, EDEL STREICHER, and ESTHER GLATZER, have cheerfully performed their respective functions in a competent, cooperative, and professional manner, demanding production schedules notwithstanding. The finished products bear eloquent testimony to their efforts.

I am also grateful to our Distributors in Europe and Israel, R' JOSEPH LEHMANN (of Gateshead), and my long-time very dear friends MR. AND MRS. JOSHUA GROSSMAN (of Bayit Vegan). Their competence in bringing the ArtScroll Series to the attention of readers throughout the world is most sincerely appreciated.

Mention must also be made of the sincere efforts and encouragement of dear friends [listed alphabetically]: R' JOSEPH BERLINER, R' ZUNDEL BERMAN, R' YISRAEL H. EIDELMAN, R' CHARLES GRANDOVSKY, R' RONALD GREENWALD, R' NAFTALI HIRSCH, R' MEIR HOLDER, R' BURTON JAFFA, my brother-in-law R' YAAKOV KIFFEL, R' YAAKOV KORNREICH, R' YERUCHEM LAX, R' MICHAEL LEVI, R' JAY MARCUS, R' ELI MUNK, R' TZVI NEUBERGER, DR. ALLAN D. NOVETSKY, my brother-in-law R' SOL SCHOLAR, R' JUDAH SEPTIMUS, R' AVI SHULMAN, R' DAVID SINGER, R' YOSEF WEINBAUM, R' NISSON WOLPIN. Their friendship and concern is warmly appreciated.

During the course of publication of the ArtScroll Series, I have been privileged to make the acquaintance and to work closely with several great Talmidei Chachomim — veritable treasurehouses of Torah knowledge and hashkafah — whose association as contributors to the Series and as friends, has meant a great deal to me: R' HERSH GOLDWURM, R' MOSHE EISEMANN, R' YOSEF RABINOWITZ, R' J. DAVID BLEICH, R' AVROHOM CHAIM FEUER, R' AVROHOM YOSEF ROSENBERG, R' YISROEL GORNISH, R' YAAKOV SALOMON, R' REUVEN DRUCKER.

Most of all I am grateful for the very close association that has flowered between myself and REB NOSSON: ידיד נבדר, mentor, critic, and chaver par excellence. Words simply cannot reflect the relationship. Suffice it to note that were it not for his eloquence, breadth, clarity of presentation of the most sublime thoughts of our Sages, and scope of his knowledge, this Series would never have gained the level of prominence it has had the z'chus to achieve. Every word of the ArtScroll Series bears testimony to his artistry and scholarly general editorship. Moreover, he has been the moving force behind my work, and has been a source of inspiration to me in many areas. I regret that I am unable to adequately express my gratitude to him. — O to be blessed with his felicity for just this one moment!

My good friend, REB SHEAH BRANDER, has constantly striven to make the Series one of beauty and esthetic excellence; and he has succeeded immensely — every volume bears testimony to his graphic artistry. Sheah's input is not limited to graphics; as a talmid chochom who delivers shiurim in his community, he has a zeal for the subject matter and frequently contributes comments and insights. During our decade-long association he has been a chaver and colleague in every sense of the words, and his friendship is appreciated beyond words.

אחרון אחרון חיבי. I thank the Ribono Shel Olam for His chessed in granting me an עקרת הבית who has created a home for our children and me which is conducive to Torah study and Yiras Shamayim, and which, to her delight, has become a בית ועד לחכמים, a gathering place for scholars. To paraphrase R' Akiva who credited his accomplishments in Torah learning to his wife: "שלי ... שלה", Whatever I have accomplished is hers." ROCHEL has patiently borne the burden of domestic responsibilities, allowing — no, encouraging — me to devote myself to this project. The children, too, — Gedaliah, Esther, Faigie, Dvorah, Tziviah, Yisroel and Baruch — have cheerfully cooperated in every way they could. May Hashem reward us that our children dwell in the 'tent of Torah' and righteousness.

The past year has unfortunately witnessed the taking of my dear father-in-law, R' Chaim Chaikel Shulman זצ"ל, to whose memory this volume is lovingly dedicated. The spreading of Torah was his life's ideal, and he did it with a generosity of spirit that left an indelible memory

with all who were warmed by his friendship. May the Torah learning this volume will engender be a z'chus for his neshamah, and may he be a מליץ יושר for the entire family, especially for his aishes chayil, my dear mother-in-law, Chaya תחי. May she be returned to full health so that she can continue to enjoy unlimited nachas from the family to whom she means so much.

I close with a tefillah like that traditionally recited at the Siyum of a volume of the Talmud:

May it be Your will, HASHEM my God, that just as you have helped us complete Sefer Bereishis, so may You help us begin other Books and complete them. May we be enabled to study, teach, observe, perform and uphold all the words of Your Torah lovingly. May the merit of the Prophets, Sages, and commentators stand by us that the Torah may not depart from our mouths and from the mouths of our children and grandchildren forever. May there be fulfilled in us the verses: "When you journey it [the Torah] shall guide you, when you recline it shall protect you, and when you awaken it shall be your discourse. For through Me your days shall multiply and your days of life shall increase. Lengthy days are in its right, and in its left are wealth and honor. May HASHEM give strength to His people; may HASHEM bless His people with peace."

Meir Zlotowitz

Tammuz, 5741 / July, 1981

--

—

•

•

סדר ויצא

Sidrah Vayeitzei

— *The Overviews*

Several topics in this Sidrah have been treated in Overviews to earlier volumes. Among them are:

Jacob's role — *Lech-Lecha and Toldos*

Tests — *Lech Lecha*

Reuben's sin — *Ruth*

Exile — *Eichah and Daniel*

The role of the twelve tribes will אִיִּיה be discussed in future volumes.

An Overview —

Jacob: Vision and Exile*

וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שֶׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חֶרְנָה, וּבְתֵיב וַיִּפְגַּע
בְּמָקוֹם — כִּי מָטָא לְחָרָן אָמַר: אֲפָשָׁר עֲבַרְתִּי עַל
מָקוֹם שֶׁהִתְפַּלְלוּ אֲבוֹתַי וְאֲנִי לֹא הִתְפַּלֵּלְתִּי ... בַּד
צְלִי קָעִי לְמִיָּהֲרָר, אָמַר הַקִּבְיָה צְדִיק זֶה בָּא לְבֵית
מְלוֹנִי וַיִּפְטֹר בְּלֹא לִינְהָ? מִיָּד בָּא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ.
'Jacob left Beer Sheba and went to Charan'
[i.e., he arrived there] (28:10). And it is
written, 'He encountered the place' [i.e., he
came not to Charan but to Bethel/Moriah]
(ibid. v. 11). — When he arrived in Charan
he said, 'Can it be that I passed by the
place where my fathers prayed, without
my praying?' ... After he prayed, he
wanted to return [to Charan]. The Holy
One, Blessed be He, said, 'This tzaddik has
come to My dwelling; shall he be allowed
to leave without spending the night?' Im-
mediately, the sun set [ibid.] (Chullin 91b).

I. The Well

Dimensions of Exile In *Vayeitzei* we read a narrative of dual significance. Jacob begins a personal exile with his flight from Esau to begin a twenty-year sojourn with Laban. There, in Charan, he would marry and give birth to all of his children except for Benjamin. He would arrive penniless and emerge with a great fortune. But despite his success in Charan he would always remain conscious that he was in exile from *Eretz Yisrael* and his parents' home, and that he was sub-

* This Overview is based on a *Schmuess* of Harav Gedaliah Schorr זצ"ל. All of its components, unless specifically credited, may be found in *Sfas Emes*.

Jacob, as the only
Patriarch who
experienced the
brunt of exile's
harsher manifesta-
tions, prepared
the way for his
posterity.

Mordechai and
Esther were in
exile despite their
greatness, while
the humblest
farmhand who
returned to Eretz
Yisrael with Ezra
was not.

ject to the constant machinations and swindles of Laban. That is one thread in this tale of exile, the *personal* travail of hounded, homeless Jacob. The second thread is the *national* aspect of this exile, for Jacob's flight must be seen in the context of the four hundred years of Jewish exile decreed upon Abraham's offspring [15:13], and as preparation for the future millenia of Jewish wandering and subjugation. Jacob, as the only Patriarch who experienced the brunt of exile's harsher manifestations, prepared the way for his posterity, for as we shall see in this and succeeding *sidros* Jacob set the precedents for Jewish behavior in exile.

Jacob remained fully conscious all the while that he was in *galus*. *Vayeitzei* is unusual in that it contains not a single space between paragraphs. In the masoretic order of the Torah Scroll, the entire *sidrah* is written as a single 145-verse paragraph. This is meant to imply that Jacob never ceased his concentration on the predicament of being parted from the Holy Land. To forget that one is in exile is to make peace with the situation. Of course, *galus* is in great measure a geographical fact. Mordechai and Esther were in exile despite their greatness, while the humblest farmhand who returned to *Eretz Yisrael* with Ezra was not — but there are also intellectual and emotional dimensions to *galus*. In a very real sense, the well established, secure, happy person of affairs in the Diaspora feels less *galus* than the *tzaddik* and sage in the heart of the Holy City who weeps every midnight as he pours out his prayers for the coming of the Messiah and the building of the Temple. Jacob never ceased agonizing over the fact that he lived in Charan instead of Beer Sheba; to maintain such awareness is a major factor in enduring — and *surviving* — exile with one's spirit intact.

Jacob's Jacob entered his personal exile with further resolve,
Oath as well. The *Midrash* expounds,

וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שֶׁבַע ... יֵצֵא מִבְּאֵר שֶׁבַע
שְׂבוּעָה

Jacob departed from Beer Sheba [28:10] ...

he departed from the well [בְּאֵר] of [his] oath [שְׁבַע=שְׁבוּעָה] (Bereishis Rabbah 68:8).

.. Many commentators teach that the word שְׁבוּעָה, oath, is related to, and derived from שָׁבַע, seven. When a person undertakes an oath, all his מִדּוֹת שָׁבַע, the seven attributes of his personality, thought, and action processes become mortgaged to the execution of his pledge or to the truth of his statement. The oath is, so to speak, a lien on his entire being and resources. In Hebrew grammar, therefore, the taking of an oath is not an active word, it is a passive word; the grammatical implication is that when one swears he becomes possessed by his oath. We find the word נִשְׁבַּע or יִשְׁבַּע, literally he was sworn or he will be sworn, for all his seven attributes become subservient to the oath. [For a discussion of the seven attributes, see ArtScroll Zemirot pp. 226-235.]

When one swears
he becomes
possessed by his
oath.

..

Merely to
remember a
resolve while for-
getting the reason
for making the
resolution is a
fragile crutch.

The Midrashic exegesis is that Jacob left home with an oath that the concepts symbolized by Beer Sheba would never leave his awareness despite its distance from Charan in miles and its even greater distance in holiness and morality. But Jacob is not content merely to swear. He goes to Charan with a strong cognizance of שְׁבוּעָה שֶׁל בְּאֵר, the source of the oath. A sincere oath exerts a powerful control on a person's actions. But even more significant in the long run is that one remain powerfully attached to the set of beliefs, values, and goals which motivated his oath in the first place. Such a continuing awareness assures that the oath will retain its force even after the passage of years and the onslaughts of antagonistic people and circumstances. Merely to remember a resolve while forgetting the reason for making the resolution is a fragile crutch. Jacob entered a foreign land with the indelible memory of his upbringing and his knowledge of God's word — that memory was the source of his oath.

Jacob was a product of Isaac and Rebecca. He had chosen to dedicate his life to the Patriarchal ideal and he solidified his choice with fourteen years of study in the Academy of Eber before he dared venture from

Beer Sheba's holiness to Charan's impurity. These were the 'well', the source of Jacob's personal attributes, and Jacob remained cognizant wherever he was that he came from there — and that he *must* remain there emotionally and intellectually, if not physically.

*Jacob, before
descending to the
spiritual depth of
Charan, anchored
himself to the
holiness of Eretz
Yisrael by means
of an oath...*

The *Zohar* compares Jacob to someone climbing down into a deep and treacherous well. Before attempting his descent, he must secure himself to the surface with a strong rope, otherwise he may fall and be lost forever. Jacob, before descending to the spiritual depth of Charan, anchored himself to the holiness of *Eretz Yisrael* by means of an oath, a resolve that he would never cut his ties with the source of his strength.

II. Jacob's Vision

בִּי מָטָא לַחֲרוֹן אָמַר: אֶפְשָׁר עָבַרְתִּי עַל מְקוֹם
שֶׁהִתְפַּלְּלוּ אֲבוֹתַי וְאֲנִי לֹא הִתְפַּלֵּלְתִּי? כִּד יְהִיב
דַּעַתִּיהָ לְמִיָּהֲרָר, קִפְצָה לִּיה אֶרְצָא — מִיָּד וַיִּפְּעַ
בְּמָקוֹם.

*When he [Jacob] arrived at Charan he said,
'Can it be that I passed by the place where
my fathers prayed, without my praying?'
As soon as he decided to return, the earth
jumped toward him — immediately,
[28:11] he encountered the place (Chullin
91b).*

The Place **T**he immediate prelude to Jacob's exile was his night at Bethel/Moriah, the place that he would recognize as the *House of God* and the *Gate of Heaven*, the place where God revealed Himself, and where Jacob made the vow that would sustain him for his twenty-two years away from home. The very fact that he came to Bethel/Moriah was in itself a testimony to the 'strong rope' by which he had secured himself to his 'well'. Jacob was already in Charan when he decided to pray at the place where Abraham and Isaac had prayed. As *Rashi* explains,

God brought Bethel/Moriah to meet Jacob. Geographic realities disappeared and the laws of physics were set aside as Jacob found himself where he wanted to be. It was Divine recognition that, in the spiritual sense, Jacob *was* in the place his fathers had sanctified; so powerful was his desire to emulate them.

In our confused state of understanding, we are so tightly bound to physical reality, that we cannot conceive of such an event taking place: If Jacob was in Charan, how could Bethel/Moriah come to meet him? *People* can move, but places cannot move, can they? That such assumptions are so axiomatic to us is a symptom of the unfortunate fact that we are conditioned to accept only the physical world as the 'real' world. Instead of seeking spiritual causes to explain physical occurrences, we seek physical reasons to explain miracles. But if spiritual existence has its own reality — as indeed it has — why should that not be the *prime* mode of existence, and why shouldn't laws of physics bend to accommodate spiritual needs?

Instead of seeking spiritual causes to explain physical occurrences, we seek physical reasons to explain miracles.

Unchanging Truth Whatever the case, Jacob was at the place, prayed there, and slept there before his long sojourn in Charan. It was there that he had his great vision. To understand the vision, we must never forget that it was revealed to *Jacob*, and it must therefore be comprehended in the light of the uniqueness of the person for whom it was intended. Jacob's primary characteristic was *מִדַּת הָאֱמֶת*, the attribute of truth, as the prophet says *תַּחַן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב*, give truth to Jacob (Micah 7:20). [For a discussion of this quality within the context of the Patriarchal mission, see *Overview to Lech Lecha* and *Toldos*.]

An essential characteristic of truth is that it never changes.

An essential characteristic of truth is that it never changes, for if it were to change then it could never have been true. It may have been 'suitable,' 'apt,' or the best possible response to a set of circumstances, but it could not have been 'true' unless it were eternally true. Jacob, as the exponent of truth had to be consistent; he could not change his attitudes and

aspirations according to moods and settings. Indeed, only because Jacob was the symbol of truth, could, his image be engraved on God's כִּסֵּא הַכְבוֹד, *Throne of Glory* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 82:2). God's Own seal is truth [חֻתְמוֹ שֶׁל הַקֶּבֶדִּיָּה אֱמֶת] (*Shabbos* 55a), so only a human personification of His seal can be indelibly inscribed on His throne. Because that was Jacob's characteristic, he could accept only a prophetic vision that was entirely consistent with his comprehension of the Divine truth.

Three Visions In the Torah's description of Jacob's vision, the word הִנֵּה, *behold!*, appears three time: הִנֵּה סֻלָּם, *behold! there was a ladder*; ... וְהָיָה מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים, *behold! angels of God ...*; and הִנֵּה ה' נֹצֵב עָלָיו, *behold! HASHEM stood over him* [28:12-13]. That word always signifies something strikingly new, therefore its three-fold appearance indicates that Jacob was shown three different levels of prophetic vision.

Chovos Halevavos explains that Jacob was shown a ladder to indicate a means by which he could attain an understanding of God.

First, there was a ladder standing on earth and extending up to heaven. *Chovos Halevavos* explains that Jacob was shown a ladder to indicate a means by which he could attain an understanding of God. With rigorous intellectual effort one can study the natural world and arrive at the inescapable conclusion that there must be a Creator. Such analysis can lead him rung by rung up the intellectual and spiritual ladder until he arrives at the most sublime understanding open to man. Abraham did it as a child when he said, in the famous *Midrashic* figure of speech תֹּאמַר לִבִּיכָּהּ וּזוֹ בַּיָּת מִנְהִיגָה? (*Bereishis Rabbah* 39:1). Many of the classic commentators attempted to prove the existence of God and explain the commandments by means of philosophical inquiry.

But Jacob would not accept this revelation. His passion for truth could not be satisfied by a form of revelation which is based on human inquiry.

But Jacob would not accept this revelation. His passion for truth could not be satisfied by a form of revelation which is based on human inquiry for, in the final analysis, such knowledge of God is circumscribed by human limitations. The person who has attained such knowledge has accomplished much, but he still lacks an experience of the Divine.

Physical process can be reduced to mathematical formulae, but the most brilliant thesis cannot take the place of a sunrise. The score of a symphony is not equivalent to a concert.

Test of Sleep Why was Jacob shown this vision for which he had no desire? God was testing his dedication to seek the ultimate level of truth — how consistent was it? The vision of this ladder of philosophical knowledge was a great challenge to Jacob. He was asleep. Of necessity, his perceptions were dulled. The self-control one exercises in wakefulness is not possible during sleep. A drowsy person can be seduced by arguments he would never accept and be induced to do foolish things he could never do while awake. But *some* things are so basic to people that they will never do them — in their dreams, in a daze, under hypnosis. A person who affects a dignified tone of voice and a sophisticated accent will slip into his natural speech pattern when his guard is down. But he will not commit murder.

Awake, Jacob would have no interest in philosophical speculation.

Awake, Jacob would have had no interest in philosophical speculation, for it did not measure up to his ideal of truth. But if he were to accept such a revelation while asleep, that would prove that his dedication to truth, while certainly sincere, was then still external. Were it truly part of his being, he could not have accepted anything that fell short; Jacob did not accept it.

A Higher Level God tested him again with a second level of revelation, a heightened one — Godly angels ascended and descended the ladder. Now Jacob saw true spirituality, for angels are but a step removed from God. Now he saw a level of holiness that far transcended the philosophical ladder. But Jacob was not moved by the sight of angels. His craving for spiritual truth required more than angels could provide.

Centuries later, Moses, too, could not bring himself to accept the guidance of an angel in place of God. After Israel had sinned by building and

worshiping the Golden Calf, God withdrew His Own Presence and dispatched an angel to lead the people. But Moses pleaded that he could not be guided by an angel. This was not a case of a refusal to obey God's word *וַיֹּאמֶר*; the prophet who had spoken to God 'face to face' *could* not — not *would* not — find commensurate spiritual sustenance in a 'mere' angel. Moses prayed:

אם אין פְּנֵיךְ הַלְכִים אֵל תַּעֲלֵנוּ מִזֶּה

If Your Face [i.e., Your Own Presence] will not come, do not cause us to travel from here (Exodus 33:15).

Why was Jacob dissatisfied with the revelation of angels?

Why was Jacob dissatisfied with the revelation of angels? He recognized that they were not a true vision of God. We can best understand the deficiency of the angelic revelation by comparing it to something more familiar — a human being.

We know that a person consists of body and soul, and that the body blocks our perception of the soul's essence; we know the soul is there, but we cannot see it. In Kabbalistic terminology, this concept is known as *לבוש*, *garment*. When a fully dressed, heavily bundled person engages in a vigorous activity, we do not see his arms and legs, hands and feet. We see only sleeves and pants, gloves and shoes. We *know* that a *body* is under the clothing, but a creature which had never seen a human body could have only a faint, and very erroneous, idea of what the organs look like. Going a step further, we know that the vital organs — brain, heart, glands and so on — are inside the body, but only a tiny fraction of the population has ever *seen* them in any form. A soul is there, too, but no human being has ever seen the soul; it is buried beneath the 'garb' of the body.

Jacob was not content to see garments and imagine what lay within. He wanted to know God Himself.

Similarly, Jacob recognized that even an angel is merely a 'garment' within which there existed the basic glory of God. Jacob was not content to see garments and imagine what lay within. He wanted to know God Himself. It is interesting and illuminating that the *Midrash* (69:1) interprets that word *בְּבוֹד*, literally *glory*, as Jacob's term for a direct vision of God. In *Psalms* 16:9, the human soul is referred to as

כבוד. Clearly, the highest form of glory is often obscured: God's holiness by angels, and man's soul by his body.

*For Jacob to insist
on a more intense
level of revelation
invited a grave
risk.*

God urged Jacob to ascend the ladder — meaning that he should accept the levels of prophecy that had been offered him. God promised that if Jacob were to 'ascend,' he would never fall from that particular level of holiness, and his children would never be exiled. For Jacob to insist on a more intense level of revelation invited a grave risk, because the greater the aspiration, the greater the possibility that he or his offspring might fail to achieve it or maintain it. Why not content himself with what intellectual speculation and vision of angels could give him, and be secure that Israel would never fall from that great, though limited height? Why insist on the greatness of an elevation that might be too rarefied?

But Jacob could not be content with such a guarantee. His passion for truth required him to know God Himself. However, an angel is not God. Just as the material nature and animal needs of the human body prevent our perception of the soul that resides within it, so the mere fact that an angel exists as a separate creature obscures the God Who created it.*

--

Jacob wanted direct knowledge of God. He wanted to be shown the ultimate truth for which he had striven all his life. He was shown it: וַיַּהֲרֹג ה' נֶצֶב עָלָיו, *and behold! HASHEM was standing over him.* Let the nations and the forces of nature be led by guardian angels — Jacob and the Jewish nation are guided directly by God.

כִּי חֵלֶק ה' עִמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֵבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ

For HASHEM's portion is His nation; Jacob is His firm heritage (Deut. 32:9).

* There are other interpretations of God's urging that Jacob ascend. Furthermore, the *Midrash* quotes an opinion that Jacob sinned in not obeying. See *Sfas Emes, Netzach Yisrael*, and *Michtav MeEliyahu* vol. III. Furthermore, there are many other interpretations of the vision, most of which are cited in the commentary. The oft-stated principle remains: the words of the Torah are rich in meaning, all of them equally valid.

III. Prayer and Fulfillment

Jacob's Contri- bution

There is a tradition that the Patriarchs originated the three daily prayers: Abraham introduced שַׁחֲרִית [Shacharis], the Morning Prayer; Isaac introduced מִנְחָה [Minchah], the Afternoon Prayer; and Jacob — there at Bethel/Moriah [see comm.] — introduced מַעֲרִיב [Maariv], the Evening Prayer (Berachos 26b). Shem MiShmuel explains the uniqueness of Jacob's contribution to the world of prayer, a uniqueness that flowed from his perception that God must be seen behind all the garments that seem to reveal, but truly obscure, Him.

Shacharis and Minchah were instituted in the morning and afternoon corresponding to the morning and evening תַּמִּידִים, continual daily sacrifices in the Temple. Maariv parallels the burning on the altar of the parts of the sacrifices that were left from the day's service. There is a basic difference between the daytime service and the nighttime burning of the parts. The actual sacrificial service is clearly holy. Its symbolism is widely perceived by the classic commentators as representing the dedication of souls and human states, it provides atonement and cleansing from the effect of sin. The blood of the offerings symbolizes the soul of the people seeking atonement.

Such sacrificial service is forbidden in the evening; it is valid only by day. It would seem as though the burning of the parts on the altar is lower in holiness, as though it were little more than a necessary way to dispose of the leftover parts.

Jacob demonstrated otherwise. He infused holiness into the mundane, or better said, he recognized that holiness was present in the mundane. By fighting spiritual struggles to reach the ultimate glory of God's Own Presence, he meant to show that behind every occurrence and phenomenon in the universe God's presence can and must be seen. This teaching carried special significance for Jacob on his

He infused holiness into the mundane, or better said, he recognized that holiness was present in the mundane.

*Even in darkest
night, he prayed,
saw God, absorbed
holiness. So must
we.*

way to exile. What he did then was intended to be a lesson to the Jewish People in all future exiles. There are times when the nation considers itself forlorn and bereft of God's Providence; times that seem like the nighttime of our existence, when light is absent, and holiness seems far away. When that happens, we take heart from Jacob's example. Even in darkest night, he prayed, saw God, absorbed holiness. So must we.

The Sages teach that when God promised Jacob the entire land upon which he lay, He folded all of *Eretz Yisrael* beneath the sleeping Jacob to symbolize that it would be his (*Chullin* 91b; see *comm.* to 28:13). Why was this necessary in view of the Talmudic principle that a new owner need make a *קנין*, *act of acquisition*, in only part of a tract of land in order to acquire possession of the entire property? If so, the fact that Jacob lay on one small part of Bethel/Moriah should have been sufficient to enforce Israel's eventual ownership of the entire land.

Holy of Holies

--

*Jews must never
be content to find
sanctity only on
occasional
excursions to
Jerusalem and the
Temple; they must
infuse every nook
and cranny with
holiness.*

By so folding the land, God signified that more than legal possession was intended. As the commentary sets forth, Jacob lay upon the eventual site of the *קדש הקדשים*, *Holy of Holies*. *Eretz Yisrael* could have easily become his without the symbolism of placing all of it beneath him, but Jacob's vision — and the mission he had adopted by seeking the truth behind all 'garments' — required that the utmost holiness be found in every aspect of life. God wanted Jacob to know that every corner of *Eretz Yisrael* was to be invested with the utmost degree of holiness.

Jews must never be content to find sanctity only on occasional excursions to Jerusalem and the Temple; they must infuse every nook and cranny with holiness.

Perhaps we may extend this concept to embrace Jacob himself. He was prepared to become the father of the tribes, the progenitor of the Jewish nation. Only then was he ready to begin the task, for only then had he merited to be shown God's Presence above him. All of *Eretz Yisrael* had to be subsumed

under the overriding concept of Holy of Holies, and all of *Bnai Yisrael* had to be subsumed in the person of a Patriarch who saw and infused holiness into every aspect of his life. From such a father could be born such children. Of such a person could it be said that *מִשְׁתוֹ שְׁלָמָה* — all products of his home were righteous.

His Family— Two Camps

What sort of family would he produce? The answer is found in the last comments of *Ramban* and *Sforno* to *Vayeitzei*. The Torah tells us how Jacob saw a company of angels as he finally left Laban and set out for *Eretz Yisrael*. In their honor, he named the place *Machanaim*, literally *two camps*: his own camp and the angelic one (32:3).

Grammatically, however, the proper form should have been *מַחֲנוֹת* [*Machanos*], in the feminine plural form. But Jacob's intention was not to indicate the numerical fact that there was more than one camp. Rather he meant to stress the *quality* of the two camps.

In Hebrew there is a special suffix which *appears* to be masculine, but actually connotes 'pair of'. Thus, *פְּעָמַיִם* means *two times* or a *pair* of times; *יָדַיִם* means a pair of hands, and *מַחֲנֵיִם* means a *pair of camps*. When two things are called a pair, the implication is that both items are identical, or at least similar.

Jacob saw before him two camps: that of his wives, children, and possessions; and that of the angels. Knowing observer that he was, he could assess the *quality* of the camps as well as their size.

*The exterior of the
angels was a
garment that
clothed God's
Presence— and so
was the exterior of
his family!*

And he saw that they were a pair! The exterior of the angels was a garment that clothed God's Presence — and so was the exterior of his family! Jacob had produced a family that was the parallel of the angels. In *Vayishlach* we will read of Jacob's encounter with, and conquest of, an angel. That was Jacob — but his children? Yes, his children. Perhaps they could not triumph over angels as could their father, but the conqueror of angels had produced a family — a camp

— that was the fitting equivalent on earth of an angelic camp above.

The promise of his vision had been fulfilled. He had lain on earth and perceived that the place where God is served on earth is the gateway to the heavens [28:17]. Now he had gone a major step further and perceived that the nation that serves God consistently and truthfully is equivalent to a company of angels.

Jacob's attribute was truth without compromise. He developed it in the home of Isaac and the Academy of Eber.

Jacob's attribute was truth without compromise. He developed it in the home of Isaac and the Academy of Eber, but only in situations that were anathema to truth — Laban, Esau, and Egypt — could his dedication to truth be tested in the most difficult circumstances imaginable. Now, his first test was over. Laban was behind him. Before him was Machanaim, proof that his vision was being fulfilled, for he stood facing a *pair* of equally holy camps.

..

An Overview /

Jacob, Rachel, and Leah

I. Jacob's Preparations for Marriage

His Particular Mission **H**ardly a chapter in the Torah confronts our image of the Patriarch with as much difficulty as does that of Jacob's relationship with his two primary wives, Rachel and Leah. We read the Torah's narrative and wonder how to reconcile it with our faith in the greatness of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. We know that Jacob was the *שְׂבָאָבוֹת בְּחִיר*, *chosen one of the Patriarchs*, the ideal human being whose wishes were motivated only by truth — yet the Torah implies that Jacob loved Rachel for her beauty and disdained Leah for her lack of it [29:17-18]; that he disliked Leah [29:31], and even after Rachel's early death he would not give Leah — mother of half his sons — the courtesy of raising her status above that of Rachel's handmaid, Bilhah [35:22, see *comm.*].

As so often occurs, however, the translation of these episodes is not indicative of what was really happening. True, the episodes *seem* so simple and straightforward; in our own experience we are not surprised to hear of marriages based on physical attraction, of enduring resentments, and of jealousy among wives and relatives. Therefore we tend to interpolate our own less-than-perfect reactions to real-life situations into the lives of our forebears. We are quite prepared to acknowledge that Jacob's vision of the ladder cannot be understood superficially, because we recognize our own insufficiency to deal with prophetic visions, angels, the word of God, and the other unnatural events surrounding the vision. But his domestic life? — that is part of our own ex-

We tend to interpolate our own less-than-perfect reactions to real-life situations into the lives of our forebears.

perience and it is inviting to see our ancestors in that familiar light. Let us attempt to demonstrate from the narrative itself that the 'simple understanding' is obviously inadequate. Then we shall seek the guidance of our Sages and commentators in arriving at a true comprehension of this complex chapter of our history.

To the believer, to the seeker of truth, what meets the eye in skimming the narrative is but a tantalizing invitation to plumb beneath the surface to seek the truth.

Harav Aharon Kotler זצ"ל saw this chapter as a prime example of the dangers inherent in superficial readings of Torah narratives, because of the above tendency to *humanize* our ancestors. To the believer, to the seeker of truth, what meets the eye in skimming the narrative is but a tantalizing invitation to plumb beneath the surface to seek the truth. *Harav Kotler* goes on to say that there are various interpretations given by the Sages and elucidated by the commentators in the light of their words. He offers this approach:

As we know, the Jewish *nation*, did not yet exist before Jacob's time. True, Abraham and Sarah had produced an Isaac, but Abraham also had an Ishmael and the children of Keturah. Isaac and Rebecca had produced a Jacob, but they had also had an Esau. *Israel* in its eternal sense was begun with Jacob. Of that *Israel*, God was to say that *וְעַמְּךָ כָּלֵם צְדִיקִים* (Isaiah 60:21). *Your nation is entirely righteous*. There may be individual sinners among *Israel*, indeed sometimes the great majority of the nation is composed of such straying individuals, but the nation as a unit is considered righteous because its bond with holiness remains intact no matter what grievous temporary results are caused by temptation, persecution, and exile.

It was not enough for Jacob to think of marriage and family; he had to prepare himself for perfection.

Jacob knew that he was to be the father of the Twelve Tribes of *Israel*, and that every single one of his children would have to be great enough to be the forebear of one of the nation's components. It was not enough for Jacob to think of marriage and family; he had to prepare himself for *perfection*. Of him it would be said *מִשְׁחוֹ שֶׁל יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ שְׁלֵמָה*, *the offspring of our father Jacob's marriage were perfect*. That could be possible only if he were to be the

quintessence of the Patriarchal ideal, if he strove and labored to bring himself to a zenith of personal greatness. The Jacob whose portrait was etched on God's throne was the architect of the nation; as such he had to mold, craft, and refine his earthly self to match that heavenly visage.

All for the Purpose That is why Jacob did not marry at forty in imitation of Isaac, as did Esau [26:34]. Even forty is a fairly advanced age for marriage, but Jacob could not think in terms of chronology alone; before he could marry he had to attain a spiritual level commensurate with his mission. When he was given Isaac's blessings and sent to Laban's home to find a mate, he was already sixty-three, but even then, he tarried. Jacob spent fourteen years of uninterrupted study in the Academy of Eber before venturing to Charan. Already when he was an adolescent, the Torah had described him as *יָשֹׁב אֹהֶלִים*, *aish tam, a wholesome man, abiding in tents* [25:27]; he strove to unite himself with God's wisdom and he became the Patriarch who remains the very symbol of Torah, but he did not feel ready to go to Laban until he had spent fourteen years of uninterrupted study without even the luxury of bed and sleep [see *comm.* to 28:11].

How much preparation is necessary to become the father of Israel? None of us can even imagine, but Jacob knew. When he arrived at Laban's home, he was seventy-seven years old. Had he felt that he was ready for the cosmic task awaiting him, he would have insisted on an immediate marriage. After all, the plan that Jacob should work for seven years *before* marrying his bride was *Jacob's* suggestion, not Laban's. Why did Jacob offer to postpone his marriage even further, without even hearing Laban's terms? Certainly, Laban would have demanded an exorbitant payment, but if the Divine plan had called for the seventy-seven year old Patriarch to marry immediately, then the haggling over terms would not have been an impediment. Bethuel and Laban had been less than anxious to let Rebecca leave their home, but God did not permit them to prevent the

If the Divine plan had called for the seventy-seven year old Patriarch to marry immediately, then the haggling over terms would not have been an impediment.

inevitable. True, Jacob was penniless, but the man who single-handedly pushed boulders from well-mouths and routinely used angels as his emissaries could surely have found a way to send back to Isaac for whatever payment was required to satisfy the avaricious Laban.

*The Torah he had
studied with Isaac
had to be
augmented with a
Torah of exile.*

Instead, Jacob *chose* to work for seven years before marrying. He *knew* — as we cannot even hope to understand — that his preparations were not yet complete. He needed seven years of unremitting labor and dedication. He needed seven years of punishing work during which he would voluntarily undertake unprecedented degrees of financial responsibility [31:38-40]. He knew that these preparations, too, were necessary prerequisites to the birth of Israel. The Torah he had studied with Isaac had to be augmented with a Torah of exile; the years with Eber would somehow make it possible for his future generations to endure and prevail during centuries of exile among the Labans and Esaus of history. His insistence on uncompromising standards of honesty as Laban's employee would instill in his progeny the fortitude to maintain its own uncompromising integrity despite the provocations of future taskmasters and tax assessors. [See next *Over-view*.]

*The years spent
tending the sheep
were as much a
part of his mission
as would be the
years he spent
with his wives and
children.*

Therefore, he did not long for Rachel while tending the sheep. What should have seemed like seven endless years passed בְּיָמִים אֶחָדִים, *like a few days* [29:20] because he *was* engaged in his mission. Whether in the fields and pasture lands of Paddan Aram preparing the way for his future children, or living with his wives to beget those children, he was involved with the same task. Had he busied himself with some senseless pursuit, he would indeed have felt each day to be another wasted eternity in his longing for Rachel — but not because he was in the field! The years spent tending the sheep were as much a part of his mission as would be the years he spent with his wives and children. The days passed quickly because they were filled with purpose.

Without Delay

Finally, when he was ready, Jacob was not in the least reticent or ashamed to demand the wife for whom he had worked — *הָבָה אֶת אִשְׁתִּי בִּי מִלְאוֹ יָמַי* — *וְאִבְוָאָהּ אֵלַיָּהּ*, *deliver my wife for my term is fulfilled, and I will consort with her* [29:21]: How unseemly! As *Rashi* remarks, quoting the *Midrash*, even a boorish lout would not speak so indelicately! Esau, the lustful murderer and adulterer, would have spoken like the perfect gentleman, yet Jacob, the truly perfect human, speaks like one overcome by lust and passion *ח"ו*! Are we to picture Jacob as a common laborer completing his term of service and roughly demanding his pay — his *human* pay? No, of course not!

As *Rashi* explains, Jacob said, 'I am already eighty-four years old; when will I beget twelve tribes?'

Let us understand this well. In Beer Sheba, Jacob had been sixty-three years old, but it was not *he* who spoke of the need to marry; Isaac and Rebecca *sent* him to seek a wife. He had patiently spent fourteen years in Eber's academy and another seven years with Laban's sheep — twenty-one years of *voluntary* delay — but we find no sign that he was impatient to unite with his chosen or to get about the task of begetting the twelve tribes. Was he even *then* a youngster who could afford such patience? And why the sudden almost embarrassing haste; having been patient for so many years, could he not have delayed the few hours or even days demanded by simple propriety and dignity?

Indeed, if we understand his demand in superficial, literal terms, it is puzzling in the extreme. But the very question suggests its own answer. Jacob never thought in terms of his need for the physical companionship of a beloved partner. Had that been his motivation, he would not have waited until he was eighty-four, nor could his emotions have endured seven years of tending sheep while his Rachel awaited him.

Jacob existed for his mission: Twelve tribes. The nation of Israel. The fulfillment of God's purpose.

Having been patient for so many years, could he not have delayed the few hours or even days demanded by simple propriety and dignity?

The people which would accept the Torah. Perfectly righteous offspring. The inner strength to endure and survive every manner of exile. Those were the visions and goals that preoccupied Jacob from the day he was old enough to know that the birthright had to be his with all its privileges and responsibilities. To become equal to them required more than half a lifetime of preparation. But when he *was* ready, what right had he to delay? Abraham had arisen early in the morning to prepare for the *Akeidah* [22:3], hadn't he? When a *mitzvah* is to be done, it must be accomplished promptly. If that were true even of the commandment for a father to slaughter his only son, surely it was true of the aging Patriarch about to lay the foundation of the Jewish People. Jacob had not wasted a moment in the Academy of Eber; he had not allowed night, cold, heat, or fatigue to deter him from tending Laban's sheep — now he would not allow a moment to be frittered away when he was ready for the next step in the process that began sixty-nine years earlier when he purchased the birthright from Esau. *'Give me my wife ... !'*

But unknown to Jacob, his mission required him to marry Leah too.

But unknown to Jacob, his mission required him to marry Leah too. Laban's greed and lack of scruple motivated him to substitute Leah for Rachel, and Rachel's almost incomprehensible kindness and sensitivity moved her to give her sister all the proofs of identity that she and Jacob had designed to thwart such a deception; and Leah's pure desire to be part of the building of Israel and her obedience to a father who did not deserve her respect forced her to accede to the scheme — but ultimately God's Providence made the plan succeed, because His Master Plan required it. That, and Jacob's preoccupation with the spiritual, cosmic implications of the wedding night. Had his purpose been physical, no amount of conspiracy could have deceived him. But his purpose was to fulfill the Divine mission of producing the nation of Israel. His spiritual antennae were not alerted because *he was in fact carrying out God's plan*, though he knew not — because it mattered not —

with whom. [The above is based on a lecture by *Harav Kotler* to a Torah Umesorah teachers seminar. It has been translated in its entirety, and published under the title '*How to Teach Torah*.']

II. Rachel and Leah

Two Concepts It still remains for us to learn why Jacob chose Rachel over Leah to be his partner. Were Leah not part of God's plan for him, we could understand: the righteous Jacob knew that Rachel was to be the mother of Israel and Leah was not. But this was not the case. Half the tribes, including Levi and Judah, the bearers of priesthood and monarchy, were Leah's children. Leah, not Rachel, would be his partner in the Cave of Machpelah. And it is axiomatic in our perception of the Patriarchs that Rachel's physical beauty could not have played a role in his choice.

He was born as Jacob, but after nearly a hundred years of intensive and unremitting self-perfection, he accomplished and then transcended the mission represented by that name.

He chose Rachel because she was his proper partner at that particular stage of his life. Jacob represents two concepts, as indicated by his names, Jacob and Israel. He was born as Jacob, but after nearly a hundred years of intensive and unremitting self-perfection, he accomplished and then transcended the mission represented by that name.

His initial task was to recognize this world as a separate entity, but to utilize it solely for God's sake. The world is full of potential and pleasure, and it is not easy to sublimate one's every urge and activity purely to a spiritual purpose. To do so was his task as a 'Jacob' and, as we shall see in the next *Overview*, Jacob strove continuously to perfect this aspect of his being. His task was not fully done until he had endured his twenty years with Laban and was on his way back to *Eretz Yisrael*. Then he was able to conquer not only human impediments but even angels.

Having outgrown the status implied in the name Jacob, he was given the additional name Israel, signifying that this world had no independent existence for him; by then he had come to recognize it

The former sacrifices to God, the latter does not sacrifice at all, for whatever he touches is God's.

only in terms of its spiritual content and utility. It is one thing to make an inventory of one's possessions, recognize them as his *own*, but know that he is to use them to serve God alone; it is quite another to see everything as *God's* own, just as the angels and luminaries are His, and to see oneself as nothing more than His caretaker. The former sacrifices to God, the latter does not sacrifice at all, for whatever he touches is God's. Of course, it is *he* who signs the check for a charity, and *he* who dedicates his resources to a sacred purpose, but how is he different from the clouds that release rain because of his prayers or the sun that shines because of his service of God? The clouds and sun are not his, but they, like everything in the universe, respond to man's performance — or lack of performance — of God's will. Man, too, can so sublimate his perception of property that he recognizes everything as God's and himself as the mover, not the master. Jacob was born to utilize his *own* possessions for God's sake. Having achieved that mission, he went beyond it and recognized everything as God's — then he became Israel in recognition of his changed and elevated status (*Michtav MeEliyahu*).

- **Two Roles** Just as the names Jacob and Israel represented two facets of Jacob's service, so were Rachel and Leah their complements. Husband and wife are partners in a mission. Their differences and similarities, even their conflicts, should ideally point toward the achievement of their joint goal. Rachel and Leah were different, just as Jacob and Israel were different.

There are two aspects of the Jewish nation.

1 — There is an unchanging degree of holiness shared by all Jews. It represents the zenith of our mission and it is the undying, inextinguishable spark of holiness that exists in all Jews, even the most sinful. When the *shofar* of the Messiah blows — the great *shofar* of the End of Days — and even the most forlorn and forsaken sons and daughters of Israel return from their Egypts and Assyrias to bow at God's mountain in Jerusalem, it will be this eternal

*Israel is the
product on earth
of this degree of
holiness.*

spark of Israel that the *shofar* will call forth. This aspect of Israel emanates from the most exalted sources of holiness; it is the ultimate holiness from which God began creation and which remains the ultimate goal of creation to reveal. Israel is the product on earth of this degree of holiness. Within it, there is no room for progress or regress; it is absolute and unchanging. Man's performance does not affect it; he can attain it or fall short, but he cannot alter it.

2 — Israel's second facet is its responsibility to live in accordance with the Torah. This facet is never static; just as human performance changes, so this level of holiness is always changing, depending on Israel's degree of success in bringing its eternal spark of holiness into every area of its life and activity. It can be elevated to Israel's exalted state at Sinai or in Solomon's golden era, and it can plummet to the level before the two destructions or the times during the various exiles when it could fairly be asked, as the Angel of the Sea asked in Egypt, 'Both these and those are iniquitous, why should one be spared and the other destroyed?'

These two characteristics of Israel are represented by Leah and Rachel. Leah is the quiet, unseen holiness of Israel. The Kabbalists refer to the world of Leah as the *עלמא דארתבסין*, *Hidden World*. Her world goes unnoticed in the hurly-burly of human activity, because it is holy and sublime beyond ordinary human comprehension. Her world is the soul of the universe as well as its ultimate goal, but it does not lower its standard to deal with the perceived 'reality' of human activity. It is unseen. Scripture alludes to this when it speaks of Leah's eyes as being weak [29:17] — figuratively, the 'vision' needed to perceive the nature of Leah is too weak, too clouded by the tangible world that constantly occupies its attention.

*Rachel represents
Israel's role of
dealing with this
world, elevating it
and ultimately
conquering it.*

Rachel represents Israel's role of dealing with this world, elevating it and ultimately conquering it. The actor playing this role changes according to his performance, and all of creation changes with him. This task is visible; moment by moment it challenges us to

decide what to think; what to do, what to dream, what to pursue. Rachel was the sister who caught people's attention, she was the 'beautiful' one who attracted the notice of people occupied with the activity of this world — and of a spiritual Jacob who occupied himself with turning the resources of his material world toward God.

A Wife for Jacob The *Midrash* declares *כָּל עֲצָמוֹ שֶׁל יַעֲקֹב לֹא עָבַד אֱלֹא בְשִׁבְלֵי רָחֵל*, *Jacob's entire being dedicated itself to work [for Laban] only because of Rachel*. The *Midrash* stresses that *Jacob's* being, not *Israel's*, was dedicated to gaining Rachel as a wife. Because it was *Jacob's* task to sanctify the material universe, to use it exclusively for God's will and transform it into a sacrifice dedicated to Him, he *had* to unite himself with Rachel. *His* entire being was suited to the fulfillment of this goal. Of course, he was attracted by her beauty, for there is no greater beauty than a person ideally suited for a task he must perform or an object ideally suited to the need of the person to whom it is directed. In terms of the union between man and woman, Rachel's beauty is unsurpassed, because she symbolizes the successful dedication to the task of directing this world's resources and activity toward its goal. She is *עֲלִמָּא דְּאַתְוָלָיָא*, the *Revealed World*. She was *Jacob's עֲקֵרֶת הַבֵּית*, *his primary wife*.

But Leah was *Jacob's* helpmeet in the loftier status of *Israel*. Once he had conquered man and angel, and recognized that all earthly possessions are but God's spirit in a material guise, Leah was the mate who best complemented him (*R' Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Sefer HaK'lallim* 32; *Michtav MeEliyahu*).

A Wife for Israel It is striking that Rachel died soon after Jacob was given the name *Israel*. Without a doubt, one factor in this phenomenon was that henceforth Leah, not Rachel, symbolized *Jacob's* ascendant mission. True, *Jacob* maintained Rachel's symbolic status as his primary wife by moving his personal belongings to the tent of *Bilhah*, Rachel's handmaid; despite his new status, the task of living with the exigencies of

Leah is the wife of Israel, but she becomes his primary companion only in the hidden holiness of the Cave of Machpelah after all of earth's temptations have been conquered.

this world never end as long as one is alive. He was given the *additional* name Israel, but his name Jacob remained with him because life on earth remains a challenge that one can never ignore as long as he lives. Just as God does not associate His Name with a living *tzaddik*, because life includes the unending possibility of sin, so the attainment of Israel-status did not negate Jacob-status. Leah is the wife of Israel, but she becomes his primary companion only in the hidden holiness of the Cave of Machpelah after all of earth's temptations have been conquered.

There is a constant refrain going through most of chapters 29-30: the task of bringing the twelve tribes into the world. The commentary makes clear that this all-consuming goal concerned Jacob constantly and led to the intense rivalry among his wives to be instrumental in attaining this objective.

That this was his mission — indeed, that it was the primary purpose of his being in Charan — was implied to him as he lay at Bethel/Moriah on the way from Beer Sheba to Charan. The *Midrash* relates that Jacob put twelve stones around his head as he prepared to go to sleep, and the many stones coalesced into one. This incident showed Jacob that he would give birth to twelve sons who would become the separate tribes that form a unified nation.

III. Building Blocks

Words and Sons Chiddushei HaRim on *Berachos* 2a comments that the word אֶבֶן, *stone*, has deep esoteric meanings. *Sefer Yetzirah* describes letters as אֲבָנִים, *stones*. In other places, children are referred to that way; indeed, the word בֶּן, *child*, is closely related to אֶבֶן, *stone*. The similarity is not coincidental. Stones are the material of constructing buildings; children are the human blocks of which nations and history are built; letters are the stuff of which words are made. The *Talmud*, (*Menachos* 29b) teaches that God created the spiritual universe with the letter י, *yud*,

and the material universe with the letter ה, *hey*. Letters can create words and worlds, and can communicate the meaning of life from God to man and from man to man.

Jacob's twelve stones represented his twelve tribes, but they also represented twelve words that were essential to the oneness symbolized and proclaimed by his sons. As Jacob lay on his deathbed, he summoned all his sons with the intention of revealing to them what would occur to Israel at the End of Days. But his vision of the final redemption left him — and he was distraught: Was there, after all, an unworthy member of his family? Had he failed to produce a totally righteous family? Had he, despite all his agonizing years of preparation and striving to prepare for a Godly marriage, given birth to an Ishmael or an Esau, as had Abraham and Isaac?

His children reassured him, proclaiming: שמע ישראל, Hear, O Israel [our father], HASHEM our God, HASHEM is One. Just as your heart is filled with nothing but the realization of God's Oneness — so do we recognize without doubt that HASHEM is One.'

Jacob responded: ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד, Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.'

The two verses of that climactic dialogue between the last Patriarch and the first Jewish generation contain twelve words. Those words express the idea that God is One and that we, the Children of Israel, dedicate all our faculties and resources to His service. And they express the hope and conviction that His kingdom will reign forever; that the time will come when every living creature will recognize that He is its Creator.

The universe belongs to God whether or not people prefer to acknowledge it.

The universe belongs to God whether or not people prefer to acknowledge it. But in the world as we know it, the perception of His Presence is fragmented. He gives life and existence to everything, but only here and there is some of His Presence recognized or proclaimed. God is One — of course! — but if we perceive Him in creation, we can,

at best, recognize only varying forms of His manifestations. The heavens proclaim one aspect of His glory, the lion another, and the frog yet another. Taken all together, the entirety of the universe proclaims His Oneness. Similarly, each tribe of Israel is a separate and unique entity. Jacob and Moses each blessed them tribe by tribe, assigning each its own role in the national destiny, but the *totality* of Israel proclaims, 'ה' אֶחָד, *HASHEM is One.*'

Becoming a Community Avnei Nezer notes that Jacob's doubt and his children's affirmation made the point that the tribes are separate but one, like the limbs and organs that are part of a single being. This concept was tellingly symbolized at the dedication of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. Each prince brought a special sacrifice on behalf of his own tribe. Each had an intention and symbolism uniquely suited to his own tribe, even though the make-up of all the offerings was identical. What is more, the one whose turn fell on the Sabbath was permitted to bring his offering on that holiest of days although normally only קִרְבָּנוֹת צִבּוֹר , *offerings required of the entire nation*, supersede the prohibitions of the Sabbath. Had each offering been solely that of a single tribe, it could not have been brought on the Sabbath. But because all the tribes are *ultimately* one, the offering of each transcended the particularity of an individual tribe and became a national sacrifice.

Jacob and the family he was destined to establish represented a complete unity of purpose.

Jacob and the family he was destined to establish represented a complete unity of purpose. So did the two wives he was to take. Leah, the representation of heavenly sanctity, and Rachel, the representation of earthly striving, had to be combined into a single Jewish nation. Indeed, as set forth in the previous *Overview*, Jacob's greatness was that he could embody in himself the concept of מְחַנֵּץ, *dual camp*, that unites heaven and earth. The coalescence of the stones declared to Jacob that he would succeed in forming twelve tribes that would act separately yet be one in their essence, and that the twelve words of God's Oneness and eternity would be embodied in

his family (*Harav Gedaliah Schorr* וצ"ל).

Understanding the ideal represented by the twelve tribes, we can see why Jacob and the Patriarchs were so anxious to bring them into being, and why each of his four wives wanted so much to be a part of doing so. To bring a new generation into the world is an ambition worthy of any mother; Jacob's wives were giving birth to a nation.

*The Same
but
Different*

R' Yosaif Yehudah Leib Bloch (*Shiurei Da'as* Vol. 3) notes that basic human emotions remain with the human race throughout millennia. Jealousy has always existed, as has generosity. Selfishness is not new, nor is idealism. But these traits are put to different uses by different people. Jealousy is a base emotion, yet קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה, *jealousy of scholars increases the store of wisdom*, as they compete with one another and grow as a result. A giving, self-effacing nature is praiseworthy, but if a scholar does not care to compete and prove his mettle, not only he will lose — the universe which lives by the merit of Torah study will be the greatest loser. The unknowing observer may fail to see a difference between the hustler aggressively seeking to outdo his fellow merchant and the scholar who spares no effort to know Torah more thoroughly. Both display the same characteristics, don't they? They do, yet they are worlds apart. Or, better said, one builds the world while the other destroys it if he allows his desire to overcome his scruples.

The same casual observer may read the story of Rachel and Leah and smile as he recalls sibling rivalries and wifely jealousies that are the familiar fare of life and gossip.

The same casual observer may read the story of Rachel and Leah and smile as he recalls sibling rivalries and wifely jealousies that are the familiar fare of life and gossip. How superficial an observation! Of course they were jealous of one another. Of course, each tried to outdo the other. Of course, each wanted a greater share of Jacob's attention. All that, the Torah says very clearly. But to what purpose did they compete? To be jealous of another's clothing and furniture is base. To be jealous and try to outdo another's attainment in charity, dedication, and holiness is commendable — even though the

same emotion is at the root of both feelings. Rachel and Leah were two worlds in complementary competition to build the future of Israel. They had human feelings because they were human, but they utilized their emotions for historic accomplishments — because they were great.

An Overview /

A Tzaddik and His Possessions

צמאה לך נפשי כמה לך בשרי ... רבנן אמרי,
בשם שנפשי צמאה לך, כן רמ"ח אברים שיש בי
צמאים לך

[Jacob said,] My soul thirsts for You, my
flesh longs for You [Psalms 63:2] ... The
Rabbis said: Just as my soul thirst for You,
so do my 248 organs thirst for You
(Bereishis Rabbah 69:2).

I. Jacob Sanctifies Labor

As
Laban's
Shepherd

*Jacob taught that
every facet of
earthly existence
must be sanctified.*

We are not surprised that Jacob's soul thirsted for God: the soul is spiritual; of course, it thirsts to be reunited with the Source of all holiness. But the organs of Jacob's body? — the body interposes itself between the soul and its Creator; the body stands in contradiction to the soul. Why should Jacob's body yearn for God? [See above *Overview*: Jacob: Vision and exile.]

As we have seen above, Jacob taught that every facet of earthly existence must be sanctified. Not only can the soul survive its sojourn in the body with its holiness intact, it can elevate the body and, by making it the servant of holiness, transform it into something that is itself holy. To such an extent can this be done, that the body can be conditioned to become virtually an appendage of the soul and long for God's closeness as much as the soul does.

It would appear that Jacob had a unique mission to demonstrate how a man of truth, Torah, and holiness must react to the most earthly of earth's activities. Abraham and Isaac were men of wealth and

property, but only Jacob was a common laborer. For twenty years from the ages of seventy-seven to ninety-seven, he was a shepherd for Laban. And what a shepherd he was! *Rambam* concludes his laws of the obligations of workmen with these words:

... וכן חייב לעבוד בכל כחו שהרי יעקב הצדיק אמר: „כי בכל כחי עבדתי את אבייך“

... So, too, is [a worker] required to work with all his might, for the righteous Jacob said [31:6]: '... For you know that it was with all my might that I served your father' (Hilchos Sechirus 13:7).

Jacob's own description of his dedication to Laban's work [31:6, 38-40] paints the portrait of a laborer who was conscientious in the extreme. Laban, for all his chicanery and fraudulent dealings, never disputed these claims of Jacob. Furthermore, the Patriarch accepted upon himself a degree of liability which goes beyond that of an ordinary shepherd. One can perhaps expect such excessive zeal for the sake of a benevolent, beloved employer, but Laban subjected Jacob to an incessant series of fraud and deception while he glibly masked his double-dealing with silkily pious speeches about how immoral it was to give a younger daughter before an older one, or how a doting father and grandfather had been duped out of the chance to kiss his daughters and grandchildren good-bye. Laban paraded himself as the very soul of upright integrity while all the while he attempted at every turn to cheat Jacob and leave him destitute. Surely a lesser person than Jacob would have considered himself justified in counteracting Laban's double-dealing by acting in kind. Or at the very least, Jacob could have followed the letter of the law by refusing to accept excessive liability, or invest excessive effort for the sake of the thieving Laban.

Laban, for all his chicanery and fraudulent dealings, never disputed these claims of Jacob.

A Taste of Dishonesty But no! Jacob, in an extraordinary manifestation of his *מדת האמת*, attribute of truth, refuses to lower himself to Laban's standard of conduct. [As the commentators point out in Chapter 30, Jacob's tactics

The lesson Jacob taught in the pastures of Charan is no less vital to the future of the nation of Israel than the lesson he taught while absorbing the heavenly vision at Bethel/Moriah ... Integrity is indivisible even when dealing with a Laban.

with the sticks were above board, his success in gaining large herds and flocks was miraculous, and he took pains to be sure that Laban would not be wiped out.) The lesson Jacob taught in the pastures of Charan is no less vital to the future of the nation of Israel than the lesson he taught while absorbing the heavenly vision at Bethel/Moriah. A Jew dares not sanctify his personal heaven while profaning his personal earth. Integrity is indivisible even when dealing with a Laban; one relaxes his standards of honesty only at the greatest peril to his inner self. When the soul thirsts for God as it should, then all 248 limbs and organs must thirst along with it.

Harav David Cohen suggests that it was this lesson of Jacob's that the Sages had in mind when they criticized one of their colleagues (*Berachos* 5b). The great *amora* R' Huna suffered a substantial loss when four hundred barrels of wine turned into vinegar. His comrades urged him to examine his deeds to find a sin that had caused the punishment. R' Huna was taken aback that they suspected him; as *Tosafos* [*ibid.* s.v. דינא] explains, many righteous people suffer losses or illness without apparent cause. The rabbis persisted. Did they know of a possible cause, R' Huna asked?

'We have heard that you do not give your foreman his rightful share of the prunings from your vines,' they said.

R' Huna protested that it was known that his foreman stole from him; by retaining the prunings, he was only regaining part of his losses.

True, the rabbis replied, but this sort of case is illustrated by the proverb: כְּתֹרֵךְ גִּנְבָא גְּנִיב וְטַעֲמָא טַעֲמָא, *On who steals from a thief feels the taste of thievery.* [Therefore, such retaliation, while legal, was sinful for a man of R' Huna's caliber.]

Jacob's lesson: an honest man dares not taint himself by dishonest dealings, no matter how just his cause.

II. Seeds of Victory

A Jug's Value An examination of Jacob's story through the portions of *Vayeitzei* and *Vayishlach* leads to the conclusion that the attainment of his highest degree of spiritual perfection paralleled — perhaps was an outgrowth — of his concept of property. Let us trace the pattern from the time that Jacob left Laban after twenty years of integrity under the most trying and tempting circumstances.

At the ford of Jabbok, Jacob is preparing to face Esau who heads a murderous army of four hundred men. Jacob has divided his people into two camps and has carried his children and valuables across the ford. Now he is alone:

וַיֵּתֶר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ. אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר שְׁנֵשְׁתִּיר עַל פְּכִין קִטְנִים. מִכָּאן לַצַּדִּיקִים שֶׁחֲבִיב עֲלֵיהֶם מְמוֹנָם יוֹתֵר מִגּוֹפָם. וְכָל דָּךְ לָמָּה? לְפִי שְׂאִין פּוֹשְׁטִין יְדֵיהֶן בְּגֹזֶל.

And Jacob remained alone [32:25]. R' Elazar said, He remained [behind] because of small jugs [i.e., insignificant items (Mizrachi; Gur Aryeh)]; from here we see that righteous people are more concerned with their possessions than with their personal safety. Why to such an extent? Because they do not extend their hands to stolen property (Chullin 91a).

A Jacob assesses his goods not according to their monetary value, but according to the moral values they represent. The Torah does not distinguish between petty and grand larceny. All thievery is a violation of the same negative commandment — the Torah says simply: *You may not steal*, neither a diamond nor a *perutah*. The judge is commanded to be as scrupulous with cases involving pittance as with those involving fortunes: יִהְיֶה חֲבִיב עֲלֶיךָ דִּין פְּרוּטָה וְיִהְיֶה חֲבִיב עֲלֶיךָ דִּין פְּרוּטָה, *Be as devoted to a case involving a perutah as to the case involving 100 maneh (10,000 sela'im) (Sanhedrin 8a).* The small earthenware jugs

The Torah does not distinguish between petty and grand larceny.

of the righteous have a significance out of proportion to their monetary value. They were acquired with strict adherence to all the laws governing civil relationships between man and his neighbor. The jug of a Jacob represents the entire *Choshen Mishpat* [The Code of Civil and Criminal Law]. Can one put a price on the *Choshen Mishpat*? Can one say that one rescues a Torah Scroll only if it is valuable, but not if there is no market for it?

Special Affection The value Jacob attached to materially insignificant items can be better appreciated in the light of R' Tzaddok HaCohen's explanation of a Talmudic dictum:

שְׁלֹשָׁה חֲנוּת הֵן: חֵן מְקוֹם עַל יוֹשְׁבָיו, חֵן אִשָּׁה עַל בְּעָלָהּ, חֵן מְקַח עַל לּוֹקְחוֹ

There are three varieties of affection: the affection of a dweller for his native place, the affection of a man for his wife, and the affection of a purchaser for his purchase (Sotah 47a).

While nearly everyone has experienced one or all of these affections, the juxtaposition of the three seems strange. R' Tzaddok explains that every person has a distinct and unique mission on earth. God provides each of us with the tools we need to perform our personal roles. These 'tools' take the form of resources — homeland, family, neighbors, intellectual capacity, physical strength, mate — in short, whatever a person takes for granted as part of his milieu may well be essential to the performance of his Divinely ordained mission. Someone may drift from country to country or village to village until he finds a place to 'fall in love with' and call his own. When that happens, it may well indicate that his spiritual self recognizes that patch of earth as having been designated as 'his.' The same is true of objects and even of husbands and wives. Whatever other attractions people and objects possess, there can also be a spiritual significance in the sense that this man and that woman, this farm and that person, this object and that owner were destined for one another.

When this is true, it can be indicated by a warm affection for the person or possession.

Negative Esau There Jacob was, alone beyond the river, when a 'man' — the angel of Esau, Satan, the embodiment of evil — grappled with him, intent on destroying him and, failing that, to maim his posterity. [For a discussion of the struggle, see *Overview, Vayishlach*.] Jacob prevailed — and thereby proved that he was worthy of the name Israel, the name that expressed his superiority to the heavenly-beings.

Surely it is not coincidental that Jacob's triumph came immediately after he signified that every bit of personal property must be made sacred. Esau represented greed, gluttony, selfishness. To him, a pot of beans was more valuable than his birthright — provided he desired the beans. Later, when he wanted the return of the birthright and the Patriarchal blessings — the attainment of that desire was more valuable than the blood of his brother and all his family. To Esau, there was no regulatory force, there was only desire. Jacob was the opposite. His measuring rod was the word of Torah. His desires flowed from the Torah; if his wish conflicted with God's law, then the law remained intact and his desire was set aside.

Jacob's small jugs epitomized what he stood for, and symbolized the crux of the conflict between the two brothers.

Perhaps Providence delayed Esau's onslaught until Jacob could spiritually conquer Esau by subduing — and thereby sanctifying — the desire for possessions; while Esau deified — and thereby contaminated — the perfectly normal human need for the means of livelihood and comfort.

III. Shelter of Succoth

Compassion for Sheep Having met Esau and escaped him unscathed, Jacob proceeded to Succoth where he built houses for his people and shelters for his livestock.

To commemorate the סִבּוֹת, *shelters*, he named the place Succoth [see *comm.* to 33:17].

Why were the shelters of his livestock so significant that he named the place in their honor? Or HaChaim comments that Jacob may have been the first person to show compassion for his animals, that he went to the trouble and expense to build shelters to protect them from the blazing sun. Jacob named the place as a reminder of this new dimension of concern for animals.

Many of the Kabbalistic masters associate the Succoth where Jacob sojourned with the Succoth festival which the Torah would later ordain to commemorate God's protective עֲנַנֵי הַכְבוֹד, *Clouds of Glory*, with which He shielded Israel when it left Egypt. Jacob protected his sheep; God protected His. Indeed, in one esoteric Kabbalistic comment, it is said that Jacob possessed 600,000 sheep, symbolizing the 600,000 adult males who left Egypt. God protected the people; Jacob, whose image graced the Heavenly Throne, protected the sheep.

-- The Succah's Power

There is a particular significance in the commandment to live in a *succah* seven days a year; the *succah* contributes something to its inhabitants. The Zohar refers to the *succah* as מְקוֹמֵנוּתָא, *the protective shelter*, which means, as the commentators explain, that the fragile shade of the *succah* has the spiritual power to reinforce faith in God's Providence. The *succah* reminds us that God's Will protected an entire helpless nation against elements and enemies, thus, it 'preserves' the effect of a Divine act. Israel left Egypt fortified only by faith in God's Word; He protected the nation in return, and the *succah* helps us preserve that faith and continue to earn its Heavenly recompense. Jacob, too, was the beneficiary of God's help based on his prior faith. He was unconcerned with the laws of jungles or economics — only with God's law. To him, the pitiful jug was precious because it symbolized his adherence

to God's Will; in return, God gave him victory over Esau's guardian angel.

Dangers of Success Finally, Jacob was free of the menace of Esau. He was enormously wealthy as he slowly guided his flocks back toward Beer Sheba and the home of Isaac and Rebecca. Now that he was rich and secure for the first time in over twenty years, would he forget the recent past and become a wealthy gentleman farmer? Wealth and tranquility have all too often been the lethal enemies of spiritual stature. The Torah warns that *יִשְׁמֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּכְעַס ... וַיַּטֵּשׁ אֱלֹהִים עֲשָׂהוּ*, Yeshurun [i.e., Israel] will grow fat and kick aside ... and forsake God Who made it [Deut. 32:15].

Jacob understood the dangers of success just as he had understood the temptations of victimization and the challenge of fear. He built protective covers over his sheep. Those shelters represented compassion as opposed to avarice; even more, they represented his wish to preserve his concept of property with the *shelter of faith* which would protect and deepen the perception that helped him defeat the angel and hold Esau at bay. That was the concept that he made eternal by his choice of a name. Property was a sacred trust because it was acquired with fidelity to God's Will — that recognition was demonstrated in the place where he celebrated his new freedom with devotion to the ideal that made him free from the shackles of material life!

Property was a sacred trust because it was acquired with fidelity to God's Will.

Then, Perfection When he left Succoth for Shechem, the Torah tells us he was *שָׁלֵם*, intact [33:18]. As Rashi explains, his health was intact for he had recovered from the injury inflicted by the angel; his fortune was intact despite the generous gifts he had given Esau; and his Torah was intact, for he had forgotten nothing during his twenty work-filled years with Laban.

As many commentators have said, there is a deeper connotation in the expression *שָׁלֵם*, intact. The word also refers to Jacob's *שְׁלֵמוּת*, spiritual wholeness, his perfection. Jacob was never static. Always he was striving and advancing. And now he had finally at-

tained the level of *perfection*. After his years with Isaac, he had not been called **שלם**, *perfect* — nor after his years of study with Eber, nor after his vision at .. Bethel/Moriah. Until then, his life had been purely spiritual, but God did not call him perfect. Only after mastering the temptation to be less than totally dedicated to a dishonest employer, after besting the alluring chimera of wealth, and after taking measures to preserve the spiritual fruit of his victories — only then could he be called perfect.

Then [see *Rashi*; *Rambam*; and *R' Bachya* to 33:20], God Himself could call Jacob *El*, [literally, *God*, but also meaning *Master*] saying, 'I am the Master of everything on High and you are the master of everything below!'

—

•

•

סדר ויצא

Sidrah Vayeitzei

ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה: ויצא
בחייו יא ויפגע במקום וילן שם כִּיבֵּא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

SIDRAH VAYEITZEI

9 Jacob's flight to Charan. His dream at Bethel.

The Torah now resumes its narrative of Jacob's departure which was begun in v. 5. The narrative had been interrupted by the parenthetical digression of verses 6-9 telling of Esau's marrying in reaction to Isaac's displeasure with the Canaanite women (*Rashi*).

10. ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע. [And] Jacob departed from Beer Sheba.¹¹

[As has often been emphasized, the Torah is not a history book; it tells us only what is necessary to convey the sense of the narrative. Hence every seemingly superfluous detail must be measured to elicit the message suggested by its inclusion]:

It would have sufficed for the Torah to have stated simply: וילך יעקב חרנה Jacob went to Charan. What is the significance of adding ויצא, [and he] departed? — The Torah thereby teaches us that the departure of a righteous person from a place leaves a void: As long as a righteous person lives in a city, he constitutes its glory, its splendor, and its beauty; when he departs, its glory, splendor, and beauty depart with him. This, too, is the purpose of mentioning Naomi's departure in

Ruth 1:7 [see *comm.* there] (*Rashi*).

In the *Midrash* the question is asked how the effects of Jacob's departure could be compared to that of Naomi. Naomi's departure left a noteworthy void in Moab because she had been the only righteous person there; in Jacob's case, however, the righteous Isaac still remained in Beer Sheba after Jacob's departure! — The answer is that the merit of a single righteous person cannot be compared to that of two [i.e., although Isaac remained, Jacob's departure still left a noticeable mark.]

The commentators explain that the mere presence of a righteous man in a place affects the moral behavior of the other residents; he acts as a deterrent against blatant sinfulness. When he departs, this restraining factor is gone.

The *Midrashim* also explain why Jacob's departure is mentioned here again although v. 7 specifically stated that Jacob had gone to Pad-dan Aram. One of the answers follows the view that Isaac had been living in Hebron at this time [see *Ramban* to v. 17]. Accordingly, after Isaac and Rebecca sent him to Charan, Jacob went from Hebron to Beer Sheba [site of Abraham's *eishel* and altar, and the site where assurances had been given to Isaac (26:4)] to seek permission from God to leave the land — as Isaac had

1. Five miracles were wrought for our father Jacob on the occasion of his departure from Beer Sheba:

1) The hours of the day were shortened and the sun set prematurely since [God's] Word wished to communicate with him;

2) The four stones which Jacob used for his pillow had, by morning become one stone [according to other versions there were twelve stones];

3) He was able to roll away the heavy stone covering the mouth of the well single-handedly [upon his arrival in Charan];

4) The well continued to overflow abundantly during the entire period that he was in Charan;

5) The earth contracted before him so that he traversed the distance to Charan in one day (*Targum Yonasan*).

28
10-11 ¹⁰ Jacob departed from Beer Sheba and went toward Charan. ¹¹ He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set. He took from

done before descending to Gerar. Jacob wanted to ascertain whether it was indeed in consonance with God's Will that he forsake the holy environs of *Eretz Yisrael* to go abroad and have children. Therefore, our verse specifies that he departed from *Beer Sheba* [after having apparently received the needed assurance]. Additionally, implicit in this repetition of Jacob's departure is that Jacob resumed his journey after his fourteen year interruption to study Torah in the academy of Eber [see *Ha'amek Davar* below].

Beer Sheba was a place that had long been associated with oaths. Its very name was given it by Abraham in commemoration of his oath with Abimelech [21:31], and Isaac was there when he reaffirmed the oath [26:33]. The *Midrash* finds in this background a further reason for Jacob's departure from Beer Sheba; he feared the possibility that he would be pressed to undertake undesirable oaths were he to remain there. First, he was afraid that Abimelech would insist that he affirm the oaths of his ancestors. This, Jacob was unwilling to do because Abraham's unwarranted pact with Abimelech had resulted in a Divinely decreed delay of seven generations before Abraham's descendants could occupy *Eretz Yisrael*. Jacob wished to avoid a similar punishment [see footnote to 11:28, p. 775]. Furthermore, he feared that Esau might seek to exact an oath nullifying Jacob's right to the birthright which he, Esau, had sworn to cede to Jacob [25:33]; and he feared that Esau would try to coerce him to renounce by oath the Patriarchal blessings which Isaac had sworn would be his.

Da'as Zekeinim notes that the Masoretic division of this *parshah* is סתוקה, *closed* [i.e., the *parshah* contains no paragraph divisions within it, and does not even begin on a new line. Thus, the beginning appears to be obscure and hidden]. This alludes to the stealthy and concealed manner in which Jacob fled his home.

Furthermore, this *parshah* is 'closed' to allude to Jacob's having been 'closed up' in the academy of Eber (*Chizkuni*).

Chatzi Menasheh [quoted by *Torah Sheleimah*] cites an interpretation that the proximity of verses 9 and 10: לו לאשה, *as a wife for himself ...* and ויצא ויעקב, *and Jacob departed*, suggests that one may leave *Eretz Yisrael* only to study Torah or to seek a wife.

וַיֵּלֶךְ חָרָן — And went toward Charan.

[Jacob went to his uncle Laban in Paddan Aram, in obedience to his mother's wish (27:43) that he escape the wrath of Esau; and in fulfillment of his father's charge that he take a wife from there (v. 2).]

As noted in the *comm.* to v. 9, according to the traditional rabbinic chronology [see *Seder Olam* chap. 2; *Midrash*], Jacob did not go directly to Charan when he departed from his parents. Rather, he detoured and spent fourteen years in seclusion studying under Eber. He was sixty-three years old when he received his father's blessing and fled; when he finally set off toward Charan he was seventy-seven. This was in the year 2185 from Creation. [Eber died two years later in 2187, while Shem had died in 2158 when Jacob was fifty years old. See *Chronology / Timeline* on page xii of Vol. I.]

As *Midrash HaGadol* comments:

'Jacob first spent fourteen years secluded in the Land, clarifying his studies under his ancestor Eber. It was only after he clarified his studies that he departed from the land.'

The commentators perceive that Jacob's long and intensive years of study in the Academy of Eber were meant to prepare him spiritually for the personal exile he would endure in Charan.

Ha'amek Davar observes that Jacob's detour is implicit in the very fact that the Torah mentions his journey again after having already mentioned his departure in v. 7. The Torah seems to be implying that after having left his parents' home, Jacob made a *second* departure, thus alluding to the fact that before completing his trip to Charan, he went to the academy of Eber for a period of fourteen years.

This follows the assumption (see e.g., *Maskil l'David*) that the academy of Eber was located in Beer Sheba.

The translation 'toward' Charan rather than 'to' Charan follows *Rashbam* and *Rashi* who render: *he set out 'to go to' Charan*, but not that he arrived there. This interpretation is inspired by the sequence of the narrative itself. Since the next verse speaks of events that occurred during the course of his journey, it would seem clear that he had not yet arrived in Charan (*Mizrachi*).

As the *Midrash* observes, we say colloquially 'So-and-so has gone to Caesaria' when in fact he is still preparing for the journey.

Ibn Ezra interprets similarly, explaining that first the Torah mentions the intended destination, and then details the events that

occurred en-route. Apparently he would render more literally: *He went to Charan*, the implication being that he was on his way when the following events took place.

[However, the Talmud cites an interpretation that after arriving in Charan, Jacob returned to the site mentioned in the following verses. This interpretation is discussed by *Rashi* in the *comm.* to v. 17, below.]

Furthermore, the *Midrash* derives from the proximity in our verse of the descriptions of Jacob's leaving Beer Sheba and arriving in Charan, that the earth contracted for him (*קפצה לו הדרך*) and in several hours he miraculously completed what would ordinarily be a seventeen day journey. [See *Rashi's* interpretation of this *Midrash* cited in his commentary to v. 17 below.]

❖ Jacob's material possessions.

As evidenced by Jacob's later statement [32:11] *כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן*, *but with my staff I crossed the Jordan*, he fled from his father's house with the barest of necessities.

Ibn Ezra to 25:34 conjectures that Isaac and Rebecca sent off Jacob with neither fine clothing nor silver and gold, because Isaac was impoverished in his old age. Jacob, therefore, had to sustain himself by tending Laban's flocks. *Ramban* there disagrees sharply, and in a long dissertation illustrates that, to the contrary, the Patriarchs are depicted as wealthy and were regarded as princes by other kings who made treaties with them. Rather, he explains, the wealthy Isaac did not give valuables to Jacob because he wanted him to flee without attracting Esau's attention, and without tempting brigands to ambush and rob him. The latter fear is borne out by a *Midrashic* interpretation that Jacob *did* carry valuables with him, but was robbed at the outset of his journey. [See *Rashi* to 29:11.]¹¹

There is, however, a *Midrash* [*Tanchuma Yashan*] which relates that

1. *R' Hirsch* perceives in the literal flow of the narrative the introduction to Jacob's independent life and to his role as the forerunner of the Jewish nation. For, although Abraham represents the nation's roots and Isaac its growth, Jacob represents the nation's trunk; indeed, we are called the Children of *Israel*, not the Children of Abraham.

Like Abraham, Jacob was commanded to leave his home. But unlike Abraham who left with his wife, retinue, and wealth, Jacob left without anything at all. He preferred to leave everything behind to demonstrate that the advantage conferred by the blessings of the birthright was not material, but spiritual. He took with him only his personality, for the

God admonished Isaac for not bequeathing Jacob everything he had as his father had done to him [see 25:5]. Isaac should not have let Jacob leave empty-handed. The *Midrash* records that, as a consequence of this, the *Shechinah* departed from Isaac and did not communicate with him again until he was about to die.

11. נִפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם – [And] he encountered [in] the place.

The Torah does not tell us *which* place. – Instead it uses the definite article *בַּמָּקוֹם*, [which is equivalent to *בְּהַמָּקוֹם*] in the place, implying that the identity of the place was so well known that it need not be specified. This indicates that it refers to the site referred to elsewhere by the designation *the place*: Mt. Moriah, of which it is said [22:4]: *he saw the place* [בַּמָּקוֹם] *from afar* (*Rashi*).

Rashi's comment, as explained by his commentators, is based on several factors:

(a) There is a rule that 'the Torah does not come to conceal but to explain' [i.e., a Scriptural passage is intended not to be obscure but to instruct (see *Rashi* to 10:25 and 21:34)]. Accordingly, a reference to a place emphasized by the definite article 'the' must refer to some previously specified place (*Tzeidah laDerech*).

(b) It cannot refer to any place other than Mt. Moriah since the Torah itself refers to that holy site as *מָקוֹם*, *place*, in several places [22:4: and as *Ralbag* notes, the future Temple site on Mt. Moriah is also obliquely referred to in the Torah as the 'place' *HASHEM shall select* (*Deut. 16:16* and frequently)]. Accordingly, by its reference to *place* here, the allusion to Moriah is clear (*Mizrachi*).

(c) It is an application of the hermeneutic rule of *gezerah shavah* [i.e., the use of a common expression with regard to two different subjects can be taken to imply that a rule which is mentioned with regard to one of the subjects should be applied to the other one as well].

(d) Moriah was – by virtue of the *Akeidah*

– the only site sacred enough for such a divine revelation; it was the supreme 'place' *par-excellence* (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*).

(e) Place names generally refer either to something about the owner or to a characteristic of the place. Because the prime significance of Mt. Moriah would not become known until the future when it would be the site of the Temple, it was called simply 'the place,' as if to imply that it was as yet unknown (*Kli Yakar*).

The traditional rabbinic interpretation that the place was Mount Moriah would seem to conflict with the simple sense of the narrative which would seem to imply that the place was *Luz-Bethel*. A reconciliation is offered by *Rashi* in v. 17 (*Or HaChaim*).

The translation of נִפְגַּע as *encountered* follows *Rashi* who – as explained by his supercommentators – interprets the word as implying the *meeting of two objects moving toward one another*, synonymous with the verb נִפְגַּשׁ. *Rashi* explains that the verb נִפְגַּשׁ is also used for *inanimate objects*, as, for example in *Joshua 16:7* where it is used of boundaries *וּפָגַע בִּירֵיחוֹ*, and it *reached* Jericho; and similarly in *Joshua 19:11*: it *reached* (וּפָגַע) to *Dabesheth* [or in our case where it refers to the encounter of a person with a place.]

Rashi continues that our Sages [*Berachos 26b*] interpreted the term נִפְגַּע [which, as in 23:8, also means *interceded*] to denote *prayer*, as it does in *Jeremiah 7:16*: וְאַל-תִּפְגַּעַי, *and do not intercede with Me*. Accordingly, Jacob is credited with instituting עֲרֵכִית, the Evening Prayer [see *comm.* to 19:27 that Abraham instituted שְׁחֵרִית, the Morning Prayer; and 24:63 that Isaac instituted מִנְחָה, the Afternoon Prayer]. The Torah used the general term נִפְגַּע to denote this prayer rather than יוֹתָפֵל, the more

Jewish home is founded upon personal qualities. He demonstrated that God is to be found above all in the Jewish home. That is why he described the place of God's presence as אֵל בֵּיתוֹ, the *House of God*; God must be found in the place where people spend their lives and bring their possessions.

specific term for prayer, since the Torah also wanted to intimate by use of this term [which implies an unexpected meeting] that the way 'jumped' [or: contracted] before him as explained in *Chullin* 91b. [See *Rashi* to v. 17.]

According to the interpretation that וַיִּפְתָּע means *he prayed*, the word מָקוֹם would be a reference to God by His designation of מָקוֹם, Omnipresent [literally: *The Place*]. [As the *Midrash* explains, God is referred to as *Makom* — 'The Place' — because 'He is the place of the universe and the universe is not His place,' i.e., God is not limited by space nor encompassed by it; rather He encompasses everything and therefore is present everywhere.] Accordingly, the expression וַיִּפְתָּע בְּמָקוֹם means: *he prayed* [lit. *interceded with*] the Omnipresent (*Mizrachi*; see *Rashi* to v.17).

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer explains in this context that God's designation as *Makom*, *Place*, intimates that God is to be found in every *place* where there are righteous men [see *Exod.* 20:21].

In his introduction to *Esther*, *Ibn Ezra* explains that He is called *Makom* since 'the whole world is full of His glory.'

However, *Ibn Ezra* denies that in the *literal sense* וַיִּפְתָּע means *he prayed* or that our verse refers to God as *Makom*. He maintains that God is not referred to anywhere in Scripture in the *literal sense* as מָקוֹם, *Place*, but only as מְעוֹן, *Dwelling Place* [see *Psalms* 90:1]. The only exception is a *Rabbinic* allusion to the word *Place* in *Esther* 4:14. He suggests that the definite

term 'the place' was used in the time of Moses to refer to Beth El, a place that had come to be well known because of this incident.

Sforno explains the definite article as denoting the *place* well known to travellers — i.e., the inn which each hamlet used to maintain in the square for travellers.

Onkelos, *Rashbam*, and *Sforno* interpret the phrase to mean that he happened upon an unnamed place where it had not been his intention to go.

וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם כִּי־בָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ — And [he] spent the night there, because the sun had set, [and he did not have enough time to go on to the next city (*Rashbam*)].

Rashi observes that a more sequentially accurate word order would have been: וַיָּבֹא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וַיֵּלֶן, [first] the sun set, [and therefore] he spent the night there. As it reads, the phrase וַיָּבֹא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ, because the sun had set, implies that the sun was caused to set unexpectedly — not in its proper time — in order to force Jacob to spend the night there.

[Actually, it would have sufficed for the Torah to state simply וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם, and he spent the night there, it being self-evident that a traveler encamps for the night when darkness comes.] That the Torah finds it necessary to inform us that he slept there because the sun had set, indicates that he had not thought of stopping there since the sun was still high in the sky. Miraculously, the sun set prematurely forcing him to spend the night there (*Rashi* to *Chullin* 91b and *Sanhedrin* 95b; *Mizrachi*).

By not narrating the events in their sequential order, and by inserting the seemingly superfluous fact that the sun had set, the Torah indicates that there was an *untimely* setting (*Maskil l'David*).

28 the stones of the place which he arranged around his 11

Baal HaTurim notes that the initial letters of the word *השמש* *he extinguished*, alluding to the untimely snuffing out of the sun's light before its time.

In fact, some *Midrashic* commentators draw attention to the similar sound of the words *בנה* and *כי בא*.

Cf. the *Midrash*:

... This teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, caused the sun to set prematurely in order to 'speak' in privacy, as it were, with our father Jacob.

— After Jacob prayed [see *comm.* to *ויקרא* above] he wished to proceed, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: 'This righteous man has come to My habitation [the place, as noted, was Mt. Moriah, the future site of the Temple]; shall I allow him to depart without a night's rest?' — At once the sun set — prematurely (*Sanhedrin* 95b).

ויקרא מאבני המקום — [And] he took from the stones of the place.

Most commentators render that he took one of the stones of the place (*Rashbam*, *Ibn Ezra*, *Radak*, *Ralbag* and *Tosafos Chullin* 91b s.v. *בחיב*).

Midrashically, however, the Sages render that he took several of the stones of the place (*Chullin* 91b, *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 835, *Midrash*, and *Rashi*). This would appear to contradict verse 18, below, which speaks of only one stone. Therefore, *Rashi*, citing the *Talmudic* and *Midrashic* interpretation that there were originally several stones, comments:

The stones began quarreling with one another, each one saying, 'Upon me shall this righteous man rest his head.' Thereupon God combined them all into one stone. That is why verse 18 reads: and he took 'the stone' [singular].¹¹

Gur Aryeh defends the *Talmudic* interpretation that Jacob took many stones by commenting that if only one stone were meant the Torah should merely have said *ויקח אבן*, he took a stone. The phraseology he took of the stones of the place, by its very ambiguity implies that more than a single stone was taken. Since verse 18 mentions only one stone, the *Talmudic* interpretation quite accurately reflects even the literal intent of the narrative. [See *HaKsav V'haKaballah* who also defends the literal sense as implying plural, since the following phrase *מראשיתו*, around his head, denotes an arrangement of more than a single stone.]

The *Midrash* comments further that Jacob took twelve stones, saying: 'God has declared that twelve tribes should spring forth. Now, neither Abraham nor Isaac has produced them. If these twelve stones cleave to one another, then I know that I will produce the twelve tribes.'

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer adds that Jacob took these twelve stones from the altar upon which his father had been bound. When these stones — which indicated to him that twelve tribes would descend from him — coalesced into one stone, he perceived that all the tribes were destined to become one people [i.e., indivisible and unique] on the earth, as it is said [*I Chron.* 17:21] 'And who is like Your people Israel — a nation that is one on the earth.'

1. [Although it is difficult to comprehend how inanimate stones can quarrel, this interpretation must be perceived, as are the 'defiance' of the waters, moon, and trees during the Six Days of Creation (see *comm.* 1:9; 11, 16), as a moral lesson to man. Thus we are taught that every person should strive to be of service to the righteous.]

More specifically, however, [as noted in the Overview to *Sidrah Bereishis*] all of God's creations — including the inanimate ones — are overseen by angels on high; and it is these 'guardian angels' that argue on behalf of their inanimate charges (*Tzeidah laDerech*; see *Gur Aryeh* who discusses the spiritual implications).

ויצא
כח/יביג
י וישכב במקום ההוא: ויחלם והנה סלם
מצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה והנה
י מלאכי אלהים עלים וירדים בו: והנה

According to another opinion he took *three* stones saying, 'God united His name with Abraham [i.e., He is referred to as *God of Abraham*], and similarly with Isaac. If these three stones will coalesce, then I am assured that God's Name will be united with me, too.' And so it was. [Other versions in the *Midrash* mention *two* stones; *Targum Yonasan* mentions *four* stones which *Yalkut Shimoni Job 899* explains as alluding to the unity and perfection among the sons of his four wives.]

R' Eliyahu Kitov ז"ל suggests that these *Midrashim* are not mutually exclusive. Jacob was groping in the dark for matching stones with which to construct a shelter. Unbeknownst to him, he picked up the same stones which his grandfather had used in the altar. When Jacob picked up the second stone a certain symbolic thought occurred to him. Similarly, when he picked up the third, fourth, and twelfth, other symbolisms struck, as are recorded in the various versions.

The *Midrash* concludes that the stones that Jacob placed under his head became soft as pillows.^[1]

Sforno also interprets that there were *several* stones. Following his comment that the *place* refers to the town inn, he explains that the stones were among those kept in the guest house for use by guests to eat or sleep on.

וישם מראשתי — Which he arranged [lit., and he placed] around his head.

He arranged the stones in the form of a rain gutter around his

head because he was afraid of wild beasts (*Midrash; Rashi*).

— But if only his *head* was protected, the *rest* of his body still remained exposed to wild beasts! Actually, we must assume that for this purpose Jacob constructed a barrier protecting his *whole* body. The *Torah* mentions only his head to intimate that it was only with regard to his *head* — the most important part of his body — that the stones began quarreling with one another; regarding the rest of his body, however, the *Torah* — which economizes on its every word — had no need to mention that he protected himself with stones (*Divrei David*).

The word מראשתי is explained by some to mean either *beneath* his head, or *around* it. Our rendering follows *Rashi*, who, citing our Sages, explains that Jacob arranged the stones *around* his head to form a shield.

HaKsav V'haKaballah, citing *Heidenheim*, defends this definition by citing *1 Samuel 26:7*: *Saul lay sleeping ... and his spear stuck in the ground* מראשתי [around (or near) his head]; and *1 Kings 19:6* *And [Elijah] looked and behold there was cake ... and a cruse of water* מראשתי [around his head]. In both of these cases the context proves that מראשתי does not mean *beneath* his head.

וישכב במקום ההוא — And [he] lay down in that place.

— I.e., in that spot whose sanctity made it entirely suitable for the prophetic dream he was about to experience (*Or HaChaim*).

The Sages in the *Midrash* explain that the *Torah* mentioned this detail to intimate a *limitation*. As *Rashi* explains: The word ההוא, that

1. *Kli Yakar* interprets the premature setting of the sun as foreshadowing to Jacob that the First Temple would be destroyed two years before its appointed end. Betokening his mourning over this sadness, Jacob placed a rock under his head. This is the origin of the *Tishah B'Av* custom of sleeping with a stone under one's head.

28 head, and lay down in that place.¹² And he dreamt,
12 and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top
 reached heavenward. And behold! Angels of God
 were ascending and descending on it.

[place], suggests only there but not elsewhere: Only in that place did Jacob lay down to sleep, but during the previous fourteen years, when he studied in the Academy of Eber, he did not lie down [to sleep in a bed; instead he would snatch a casual nap whenever necessary] — so engrossed was he in Torah study.

According to another view in the *Midrash*, the implication was that only in that place did Jacob lie down to sleep, but not during the twenty years that he was in Laban's house.

Why, then, did Jacob lie down now? *Divrei David* suggests that Jacob lay down to sleep now, perhaps because he perceived that the premature setting of the sun was a Divine portent that he should lie down and spend the night there.¹¹

12. וַיִּחְלֹם — [And] he dreamt.

Dreams mentioned by Scripture are understood to be vehicles of prophecy; otherwise the Torah would not cite them. Cf. *Job* 33:15, 16: *In a dream, in a vision of the night ... [God] opens the ears of man.*

Rambam, in *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* writes: All the prophets [except Moses] experienced prophetic manifestations only in dreams — at night, or by day after a deep sleep had fallen upon them, as

it is said, *I make Myself known unto him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream* [Numbers 12:6 see comm. there.] When they had a prophetic experience their limbs trembled, their physical strength failed them, their thoughts became confused. As a result the mind was left free to comprehend the vision it saw, as occurred to Abraham [Gen. 15:12] and Daniel [Dan. 10:8]. [See also *Moreh Nevuchim* 2:36-38; *Derech Hashem* 3:5.]

וְהָיָה קֶלֶם מִצֵּב אֶרְצָה וְרָאִשׁוֹ מֵצֵיץ הַשָּׁמַיִם — And behold! A ladder was set earthward, and its top reached heavenward.

[The commentators draw attention to the phrase מִצֵּב אֶרְצָה, set earthward. i.e., 'toward' the ground, (rather than הָאָרֶץ, 'on' the ground) implying that the ladder originated in heaven and extended down toward the earth.]

The connecting ladder clearly intimated that there was a means of communication upwards from the earth. But the ladder did not come there by chance. It was מִצֵּב, set; a Higher Power had placed it אֶרְצָה, facing earthward to imply that the will and power that emplaced it were not earthly but heavenly. Nevertheless, the ladder was meant

1. *Kli Yakar* infers that Jacob's refusal to lie down until he reached this place was in the nature of an oath that he would permit himself no rest until he found the place where God's Presence would eventually find its resting place on earth.

Similarly, in vowing that he would not rest in his bed until he had found the place where the Temple would be built, David referred to the God of Jacob, an allusion to the similar vow made earlier by Jacob. Thus David vowed: *If I allow sleep to my eyes, slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for HASHEM, a resting place for the Strong One of Jacob* (Psalms 132:4, 5).

to provide a means for people to raise themselves spiritually: וראשו מגיע השמימה, and its top reached heavenward (Hirsch). [See Symbolism of the Dream, below.]

והנה מלאכי אלהים עלים וירדים בו — And behold! Angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

First ascending and then descending? [We would expect to find angels of God descending first since they originate from heaven.] — The angels who escorted Jacob in Eretz Yisrael were not permitted to leave the precincts of the Land; they therefore ascended to heaven and others descended to escort him in the course of his travels outside the Holy Land (Rashi citing Midrash).

[This is based on the tradition that two angels are assigned to escort man at all times. See Psalms 91:11; Orach Chaim 83; and Maharsha to Chullin 91b. It was these angels whom Jacob saw in his dream.]

According to another opinion in the Midrash, the angels whom Jacob now saw ascending were the ministering angels who, 138 years earlier at the overthrow of Sodom, had revealed God's plan to Lot and boasted that they were going to overthrow the place [19:13]. They had been banished from the Divine Presence for all these 138 years. Now they were finally permitted to ascend to be given a new mission. Having received their new assignment, they descended again. [See comm. to 19:13, page 689, for the calculation of these 138 years.]

[There are opinions among the Midrashic commentators that the 'wings' of these angels were 'clipped' — in the deeply esoteric sense — and therefore they could not ascend on their own. Now they perceived the descent of this heavenly ladder as a Divine invitation, as it were, for them to finally reascend and descend with a new mission. According to others (see Yafeh Toar and Etz Yosef) these banished angels were the same ones who accompanied Jacob in Eretz Yisrael. Having completed their mission of escorting Jacob, they ascended.]

In the *literal* sense, however, no deduction need be drawn from the prior mention of *ascending* for it is respectful to speak first of an ascent (Ralbag).

The phrase עלים וירדים is usually interpreted in its simple sense: *were ascending and descending on it* — i.e., on the ladder. There is a view in the Midrash that בו is to be interpreted on him — i.e., the ascent and descent of the angels was dependent upon Jacob because in heaven, he who speaks in Israel's favor is exalted; in his disfavor is debased. Thus, some angels were ascending because they exalted Jacob, but others descended because they maligned him. On earth, however, the reverse is true: He who speaks in Israel's favor is debased, while he who speaks in Israel's disfavor is exalted. [See comm. to ArtScroll Lamentations 1:5 citing Gittin 56a: 'Whoever causes Israel distress attains leadership'.]

§The Symbolism of the Dream.

Pesikta Zutres observes that Jacob's dream is unusual in that its interpretation — unlike the other prophetic dreams recorded in Scripture — is not given in the Torah.

The Sages in the Midrash have variously interpreted the imagery of Jacob's dream, as have the later classical commentators. Although a thorough representation would take a volume by itself, a selection of the various interpretations follow. [The subject is also discussed in the Overview.]

In general, the expositors agree that the vision was a disclosure of the future of the Jewish nation. Accordingly, the interpretations that follow are not mutually exclusive: all of these allusions — and perhaps others that remain unrevealed to us — were concurrently implied in Jacob's prophetic dreams.

[It would seem that it was particularly important that this prophetic dream be shown Jacob only now when he was fleeing Esau's wrath. At this perilous time, Jacob was given this assurance that his father's blessings would be fulfilled through his progeny who would be born in exile. God wanted to

reveal to him that He would be with Jacob even far from Isaac's home.]

□ **Sinaitic Vision.** The מַלְאָכִים, *ladder*, represents a prophetic allusion to מַלְאָכִים, *Sinai* — both words having the same numeric value [130]; the angels represent Moses and Aaron, and God's stance upon the ladder refers to the revelation of the *Shechinah* atop Sinai (*Midrash*). [Accordingly, we may see the Torah, given at Sinai, as the bridge connecting heaven and earth through the agency of Torah sages as represented by Moses and Aaron.]

□ **The Altar.** Another interpretation (*ibid.*): The ladder represents the altar; its top in heaven refers to the fragrance of the sacrifices which ascends on high; ascending and descending angels allude to the High Priests performing the service; God's stance above it is reminiscent of *Amos* 9:1: *I saw my Lord standing above* [נֹצֵחַ עַל] *the altar*.

□ **The Four Kingdoms.** *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, in the best known of all the interpretations, equates the import of this vision with Abraham's vision at the Covenant Between the Parts [see 15:9-18]. Jacob was symbolically shown [as was Abraham (see *Ramban* to 15:12 and footnote to 14:1, page 474)] the Four Kingdoms which would, after the Egyptian bondage, successively *ascend* to subjugate Israel, and then *descend*, and fall from power. The angels accordingly represent the guardian angels of the nations [which are chosen by God to be the 'rod of His anger' by becoming His earthly agents to punish Israel. Thus, as *Abarbanel* explains, the vision of these angels traversing the heavenly ladder intimated that their dominion was influenced from Heaven.] ...

Accordingly, Jacob was shown the

angel of the Babylonian Empire ascending 70 rungs [one for each year that Israel would be subjugated during the Babylonian Exile], and then descending. Then the angel of Media ascended 52 rungs and descended; the angel of Greece climbed 180 rungs and descended, representing the years of their respective domination of Israel. Jacob was then shown the angel of Edom [=Rome. Traditionally this refers to the current, lingering exile amid Western Civilization]. Edom ascended an undetermined number of steps, boasting that he would climb to the utmost heights and be like God Himself [see *Isaiah* 14:14], but Jacob did not see him descend. [This uninterrupted ascendancy alluded to the unspecified duration of the Edomite Exile.] Jacob became frightened that Edom's dominion would last forever ... God assured him that Edom's angel would ultimately cease [for as God assured Jacob in v. 15, He would be with Jacob — throughout his descendants' exiles — to guard him wherever he would go, and return him to the Land (*Abarbanel*).] [Cf. slightly different versions in *Sh'mos Rabbah* 32; *Vayikra Rabbah* 29; and *Ramban* to v. 13. (Cf. *Avodah Zarah* 9a according to which the Medes ruled 34 years.) This *Midrash* does not appear in *Radal's* edition of *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*. Apparently it was excised by Christian censors.]^[1]

[The interpretation that Jacob's dream represented the Four Monarchies assumes that there were four angels, each the guardian angel of one of the monarchies. That there were four is the view of the Sages in *Chullin* 91b and *Midrash*. It is based on this reasoning: Unless Scripture specifies otherwise, we must assume that the use of a plural form indicates that there were two. This assumption derives from the principle that the Torah comes not to conceal, but to

1. In *Vayikra Rabbah* 29:2 the *Midrash* continues:

The Holy One, Blessed be He, then ordered Jacob: 'You ascend as well.'

Jacob grew frightened and said: 'Perhaps, Heaven forbid, just as these are destined to descend, so, too, will I?'

God reassured him that once he would ascend there would be no descent for him.

Jacob would not believe, so he did not ascend [i.e., he had no confidence in his ability to remain sinless; he was apprehensive that his eventual sins might cause the forfeiture of the

clarify; had more than two been meant, the number would have been specified. Thus, since we are told that angels ascended and other angels descended, we must assume that there were a total of four angels.]

Tosafos HaRosh Hadar Zekeinim cites a version that God also showed Jacob the angelic prince of the Egyptian monarchy ascending 210 rungs, and then descending. [This represented the 210 years of bondage in Egypt. See *comm.* and footnote to 15:14 on page 527, and *Rashi* to 42:2.]

□ **The Land's Greatness.** *Rashi*, reflecting the exposition of the Sages, comments that the dream was designed to emphasize to Jacob the spiritual superiority of *Eretz Yisrael* over all other lands. Because Jacob was destined to spend more of his mature life outside of the Land then did the other Patriarchs, God wanted to instill within him an intense desire to return to the Land. Therefore, Jacob was shown that the angels of *Eretz Yisrael* are of such an exalted spiritual level that they cannot leave the Land. Instead, they return to heaven and are replaced by lesser angels (as explained by *Abarbanel*).

□ **God's Emissaries.** *Ibn Ezra* cites two interpretations:

(a) The ladder symbolizes the soul which descends from above; the angels represent wise thoughts (*R' Shlomo Ibn Gabirol*);

(b) The ladder represents the vehicle by which one's prayer ascends to heaven and by which salvation descends from heaven (*R' Yehoshua ben Yehudah*).

Ibn Ezra concludes, however, that the most acceptable interpretation is that the ladder is emblematic of the link

between the earthly and heavenly spheres. Nothing is hidden from God, and temporal matters are dependent on the celestial. The ladder, then, is the vehicle on which the angels return to the heavens to report on the missions entrusted to them on earth ... The symbolism is that of a king's courtiers reporting to their monarch although, of course, God requires no one to inform Him of what has transpired.

□ **Wisdom for Earthly Use.** *Rambam* in *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:15 explains that the ladder symbolizes the vehicle which may be climbed by all who wish to attain a knowledge of Him Who is permanently above the summit of the ladder [see *Rambam's* explanation of נָצַב עָלָיו in v. 13.]. The angels in this context represent the prophets [i.e. emissaries of God]. The ascendancy — the attainment of a certain height of the ladder [i.e. of wisdom] — precedes the descent — the application of the knowledge thus acquired, for the training and instruction of mankind. [See *Rambam's* interpretation of the term ירד, descent, in *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:10.]

[In *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 7:3, however, *Rambam* mentions only the interpretation that the angels on the ladder symbolized the Four Kingdoms and their successive oppressions of Israel (see *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* above). He explains that 'although matters communicated in a prophetic vision are communicated to a prophet in allegorical form, its interpretation is impressed upon his mind simultaneously with the vision, as was the case with Jacob, who dreamt symbolizing the Monarchies and their oppression of Israel.']

promise, and deprive him of God's blessing (*Radak*). *Ramban* explains (footnote to 15:2, page 506), the righteous never take their righteousness for granted and are never confident of their deservedness in this world. (See also *comm.* to קָטַנְתִּי in 32:11.)

'Had you believed and ascended,' God said, 'you would never have come down. Now, however, your descendants are destined to be enslaved to the Four Monarchies in this world! Jacob was frightened. 'Will this endure forever?' he asked.

God assured him that it would not; that He would ultimately redeem Israel.

□ **Jacob's Uniqueness.** Ramban generally concurs with Ibn Ezra. He explains that this prophetic dream was meant to convey to Jacob that whatever happens on earth is effected by angels whom HASHEM has sent to walk the earth to and fro [see Zechariah 1:10-11], and who act on Divine instructions. They do nothing, however, without first ascending to 'report' to God and receive His charge whereupon they descend to follow His command. As for Jacob, however, God assured him that he would be *חָסֵד וְחַסְדוֹ*, God's portion. Accordingly he would not be under the power of the angels, but under God's direct protection. [See comm. to v. 15; see also footnote on page 340.] Abarbanel, citing this view, adds that in his freedom from the control of angels, Jacob would be greater than other righteous men of whom it is written [Psalms 91:11] that God will give His angels charge over them.] Ramban also cites the view of Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer that this vision paralleled that of the vision shown Abraham in the Covenant between the Parts.

□ **God's Superior Insight.** R' Hirsch writes that the angels were ascending and descending *בִּגְבוּרָה*, against Jacob, for the angels came from heaven with the celestial image of man as he *should* be. The vision of man as he is — falling short of the goal assigned him — turns the angels against him. In the case of Jacob, the Sages teach that the angels were angered by the fact that he had the temerity to sleep in so holy a place. Instead, the sanctity of the place should have awakened in him a desire for greatness. Therefore, the angels

prepared to 'endanger his life' (Chullin 91b). Then God appeared standing at the top of the ladder. The word *נִצָּב*, standing, suggests undivided attention. The implication is that God gives His attention to the person in a manner of which the angels are not capable. He sees man's potential and protects him even though man's current performance falls short of the goals toward which he must strive.

13. וְהִנֵּה ה' נִצָּב עָלָיו — And behold! HASHEM was standing over him.

— To protect him (Rashi).^[1]

According to Chullin 91b, the angels were jealous of Jacob because they perceived his image on the Throne of Glory [which implied that he was on a higher plane than they] and they wished to harm him. Therefore, as the verse says, Behold HASHEM was standing above him [to protect him (Rashi).] The Talmud continues that were this fact not expressly stated in Scripture, we would not dare picture God standing like a human father fanning his son [to protect him from the sun's burning rays (Rashi; see Maharsha)].

Thus, Maharsha concludes, it would appear that in this exegesis Rashi goes according to the view that the angels ascended and descended *בִּגְבוּרָה* on Jacob, as the Midrash interprets above. However, in his comment to verse 12, Rashi apparently follows the interpretation that Jacob's escorting angels ascended and descended the ladder, not to harm Jacob, but because the angels of the Holy Land were replaced by those from outside the Land.

According to Mizrahi, however, Rashi's two comments are consistent. When the escorting angels ascended, Jacob was left unprotected until the other escorting angels

1. The Midrash derives from this that idolators must stand over and protect their deities, whereas the True God protects His adherents:

Rav Yochanan said, The wicked stand over their gods, as it says [41:1]: And Pharaoh dreamed, and behold, he stood over the river [i.e. the Nile, which the Egyptians worshipped]; but the God of the righteous stands over them, as it says, And behold, HASHEM was standing over him.

אֲבָרְהָם אָבִיךָ וְאֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
אָתָּה שׁוֹכֵן עָלֶיהָ לְךָ אֶתְנָנָה וּלְיִרְעָק:

וּיצא
כח/ג

descended. To fill this void, HASHEM Himself stood guard over Jacob.

Why, then, did the second group of angels not descend first, so Jacob would not be left unprotected? — One 'kingdom' may not encroach even for a moment upon another; i.e., Jacob could not be served simultaneously both by angels of *Eretz Yisrael* and by those of outside lands. Therefore, the first escorting angels had to depart before the others could replace them (*Gur Aryeh*).

The translation was *standing over him* is literal. Actually, as *Rashi* explains in 18:2, the phrase means *standing near him*, but when the Deity is the subject, the respectful term *upon* is used to avoid the implication that the divine and human are on equal footing.

The *Midrash* in commenting upon the depiction of God being *upon* him, notes that the Patriarchs are the 'chariot' of God; thus He may indeed be described as being 'upon' them. [See also *Rashi* to 17:2.]

Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim*, 1:15 explains that the verb נָצַב is a homonym which depending on the context, means either to stand, place oneself, or to be continuous or permanent as in *Psalms* 119:89: נָצַב בַּשָּׁמַיִם. Your word is established in Heaven. When the word refers to God it must be understood in the latter sense, as in our verse: And behold, HASHEM was standing upon it [the ladder], appearing as eternal and everlasting [see *Rambam's* interpretation of the symbolism of the dream, above.]

The word הִנֵּה, *behold*, occurs five times in this vision. This frequent use is explained by the commentators to emphasize that Jacob's vision was more than a mere fantastic dream: The word הִנֵּה, *behold*, is used only to introduce something of perceptive substance (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Ha'amek Davar notes that Jacob was shown angels before seeing the *Shechinah* to emphasize that God

conducts His government much like that of earthly monarchs [in the sense that one sees the king's entourage before seeing the king himself.]

אֲנִי ה' — I am HASHEM.

[See *comm.* to 15:7 where it is explained that God's identification of Himself as HASHEM does not conflict with *Exodus* 6:3 where God tells Moses: *By My Name HASHEM I did not make Myself known to them* (i.e., the Patriarchs).]

אֱלֹהֵי אֲבָרְהָם אָבִיךָ וְאֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק — God of Abraham your father and God of Isaac.

[Abraham was not Jacob's father — Isaac was. Even if father is interpreted to mean ancestor, the verse should have more properly read: *God of Abraham and Isaac your fathers*.]

The appellation *father* for Abraham is meant to suggest that Abraham is considered to be Jacob's father only, since Abraham's heritage would pass on in its entirety through Isaac to Jacob. Abraham's other biological offspring—Ishmael and Esau—are not considered to be his 'children' in the full sense of the word (*Radak*). [See *comm.* to 21:12: בִּי בְרִיָּה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְךָ יָרַע; and to v. 15 below s.v. אֲשֶׁר.]

And as *Abarbanel* notes, Abraham is referred to as Jacob's father because the promise that Isaac gave to Jacob [28:4] was originally given to Abraham. Thus, in effect, Isaac but served as a conduit to Jacob and so Abraham, even more than Isaac, was therefore considered Jacob's spiritual father.

28 father and God of Isaac. The ground upon which you
13 are lying, to you will I give it and to your descen-

Hirsch notes, in a similar vein, that nowhere else is a grandfather called a father, while the true father is not so described. Obviously, the relationship so depicted is not the physical one. In effect, therefore, Jacob was told that he should consider himself the spiritual heir of Abraham to whom God said, *החזק ללכת לפני ה' והיה תמים* *walk before Me and be perfect* (17:1). Abraham's mission attained its initial realization with Jacob, the one who established the first Jewish household.

Tosafos HaRosh suggests that *your father* refers to both Abraham and Isaac, the implication of the passage being: *I am the God of your father: God of Abraham and God of Isaac*.

Ha'amek Davar refers to Exodus 3:6 and 15 where he shows that the expression 'God of Abraham' refers especially to God as the Protector of Israel, while 'God of Isaac' refers to Him as the Provider of Sustenance. In Jacob's present predicament, he needed primarily an assurance of safety from the dangers of the journey and from his mortal enemy Esau. Therefore, although God implied assurance of both his safety and sustenance by describing Himself as the God of Abraham and of Isaac, He stressed Jacob's need for protection by the additional appellation *אביר*, *your father*, with regard to Abraham.

Rashi notes that it is exceptional

for God to associate Himself with a living person. Indeed, such a relationship is found nowhere else, in keeping with the principle *He puts not trust even in His Holy Ones* [Job 15:15 — i.e., since even the righteous can succumb to temptation while they are still alive, God does not allow His Name to be associated in a permanent manner with potential sinners]. In this case, however, God *did* associate His name with Isaac. However, since Isaac was blind and confined to his home, he was regarded as dead in the sense that the Evil Inclination left him and it was unlikely that he would be further subject to temptation [*Tanchumah*].

[Cf. references to this verse in 32:10 where Jacob later invokes this promise.]

הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שֹׁכֵב עָלֶיהָ — *The ground [or: land] upon which you are lying.*

I.e., the land of Canaan (*Sforno*).

[Are we to intimate from this verse that Jacob was promised no more than the piece of ground upon which he lay? (*Rashi*, *Chullin* 91b)]:

— God 'folded' the whole of Eretz Yisrael beneath him as a token that it would be as easily conquered by his descendants (*Chullin* 91b) as the four-cubit piece of ground upon which he lay (*Rashi*).⁽¹⁾

1. *Tur* cites his father, the *Rosh*, that the site upon which Jacob lay was later to be the Temple (*Pesachim* 88a) and beneath him was the *אֶבֶן שִׁתָּה*, *Foundation Stone* [the first part of earth to be created and from which the rest of the earth sprang forth, and upon which the Ark of the covenant rested in the Holy of Holies in the Temple (see *Yoma* 54b and *Ramban* to 1:2 and further v. 17).] This was the center of the earth, and from there the ground unfolded (see *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 35) to the four 'ends of the earth.'

Accordingly, since God bequeathed to Jacob this nucleus of earth, then *ipso facto* the rest of the land would be his, too. Therefore, God did not draw a comparison with the *stars of the*

ויצא כח/יד והיה זרעך כעפר הארץ ופרצת ימה וקדמה וצפנה ונגבה ונברכו בך כל-

The *Midrash* derives from the phraseology [the term *שכב* also refers to burial] that the Land would belong to Jacob's descendants only on the condition that he would be buried there [see *Etz Yosef*.]

Because, following this *Midrash*, the inheritance of the Land would be dependent on his burial there, Jacob insisted, prior to his death, that he not be buried in Egypt [47:29]. He could not be content, as was Joseph, with a pledge that his remains would be taken to *Eretz Yisrael* after the Exodus [50:25], because unless he, Jacob, was buried there, Israel would not have received the Land (*R' David Cohen*).

To you will I give it and to your descendants.

To you — potentially, and to your descendants — in actuality; *descendants* here meaning future descendants (*Ibn Caspi*).

[This is yet another example of God's reiteration to each of the Patriarchs of His promise of the Land.]

The promise to you carries within it the implicit assurance that though Jacob was now fleeing the Land, *he* would yet return to *dwell* in it. However, it would be only his

descendants who would actually possess it (*Da'as Soferim*).

You will be considered a prince of God by its inhabitants as were Abraham [see 23:6] and Isaac [apparently a reference to 26:28] (*Sforno*).

[Apparently *Sforno* intends to explain the significance of the blessing *here* during Jacob's flight. Although Jacob was now without worldly possessions and had but a few stones beneath him, he was assured that he would some day possess the Land and be considered a prince of God in it among its inhabitants as were his forefathers.]^[1]

[And] *your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth.*

— I.e. as numerous as the dust of the earth (*Onkelos*) [This, of course, is meant only in the figurative sense; since mankind — with its *lebensraum* needs could never be literally as numerous as the dust (*HaKsav V'haKalah*).]

... And Israel will be as basic to earthly existence as the dust. From the earth all is built and to it, all ultimately return. Not an atom of it is ever lost (*Hirsch*).

heaven as He did with Abraham [see 15:5], but with the *dust of the earth* in all directions — as if to intimate: just as the elements scattered in all directions from the spot where you lay, so will your descendants scatter to the west, east, north, and south.

1. Compare *Sanhedrin* 111a:

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses, 'Alas for those' [i.e., the Patriarchs] who are gone and no more to be found! For how many times did I reveal Myself to the Patriarchs ... and they did not question My Attributes [i.e., My 'dealings' with man]; ... I said to Jacob: *The ground upon which you are lying, to you will I give it and to your descendants*, yet [upon his return from Paddan Aram] Jacob sought a place to pitch his tent and did not find one until he purchased it for a *hundred kesitah* [33:19].

[A similar observation is made of Abraham, who, notwithstanding God's many promises to give him the Land, was landless and had to *purchase* a burial plot to bury his wife. Nevertheless he never doubted God's ways (see footnote page 868). Similarly, though God promised to bless Isaac in Gerar (26:3), his servants still had to engage in controversy when seeking water to drink (26:20). Nevertheless, Isaac never doubted God's ways.]

28 dants. ¹⁴ Your offspring shall be as the dust of the
14 earth, and you shall spread out powerfully westward,
 eastward, northward and southward; and all the

[See comm. to parallel blessing to Abraham in 13:16, page 470.]

Sforno connects this phrase with the following one, rendering: *Only after your offspring shall have become as degraded as the dust of the earth [see Isaiah 51:23] shall they spread out powerfully to the west, east, north, and south.* For, as the Sages have taught, God's future salvation will come only after Israel has experienced much degradation. [See Overview to ArtScroll Daniel.]

[This follows an interpretation in *Sh'mos Rabbah* 25 which cites *l Samuel* 2:8: *He raises up the poor out of the dust.*]

R' Bachya interprets similarly. God compared them to the dust of the earth rather than to the stars in heaven [as He did when He blessed Isaac in 26:4] to intimate that Israel will be like dust in ways other than abundance. Dust has the connotation of lowliness inasmuch as Israel would be downtrodden like the dust while in exile. Also, like dust, however, they would endure everything and prevail, just as the earth survives all those who tread on it [see footnote.] As Isaiah foretold [Isaiah 26:5]: *He brings it to the dust, yet it is from the dust that Israel will be redeemed, as it is written [ibid. 52:2]: Shake yourself from the dust, arise ... O Jerusalem.*¹¹

וּפָרְצָה — And you shall spread out powerfully.

Following the above interpretation that the subject of the verse is Jacob's offspring — for it is they who will multiply, be degraded, and expand — the phrase should have

read וְיִפְרְצוּ, and they shall. Since it reads in the singular, the verse apparently refers to Jacob. It alludes to the Midrashic comment [see comm. to ArtScroll Eichah 2:3 s.v. נִיבָרָה] that 'when punishment comes into the world, no one feels it as much as Jacob and when there is good in the world no one rejoices as much as Jacob' [see Psalms 14:7] (Kli Yakar).

The commentators vary in their definition of the verb פָּרַץ, which in its most literal sense, connotes *breaking forth* through narrow confines (Radak). According to Ibn Ezra, the connotation of וּפָרְצָה is *increase numerically* [i.e., outgrow your premises].

Our translation, as always, follows Rashi, who, like Onkelos explains the connotation of the word to be: *you shall spread out powerfully*, as in Exodus 1:12: וְכֵן יִפְרָץ, and so he became powerful. [Thus Rashi distinguishes the positive connotation here from the negative connotation of the same word in Exodus 19:22 and 19:24 פָּן יִפְרָץ בָּם, (where Rashi explains *break forth against them* as connoting *bring death to them*) (Mizrachi).]

The implication of Rashi, then, is that the intent of the blessing is: May you [through your descendants] have the unrestricted strength to overflow and populate any area of their choice: West, east, north and south (R' David Feinstein).

יָמָה וְקִרְמָה וְצִפְנָה וְנִגְבָּה — Westward, eastward, northward, and southward.

I.e. to the four corners of the world (Rashbam).

1. The comparison of Jacob's descendants to the dust of the earth is appropriate, notes Tzror HaMor: Everyone tramples the ground; but in the end the earth swallows them all.

Furthermore, all trample the earth but all are sustained through it (Sefer HaBris).

וַיֹּצֵא כַח/טו טו מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָרֶץ וּבְיָרֶעַךְ: וְהָיָה אֲנֹכִי עִמָּךְ וּשְׁמִרְתִּיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-תֵּלֵךְ

— An unbounded heritage [נחלה] — unlike the delineated territory promised to Abraham [13:17], or to Isaac [26:3] (*Shabbos* 118b).^[1]

The sequence of directions reflects the order of conquest led by Joshua. First, they advanced *westward* capturing the entire territory from the *eastern* border to the west. Then they turned *southward*, capturing the entire land from the south (*Malbim*).

Abarbanel comments that the blessing of the four directions is an allusion to the four encampments into which Jacob's descendants would be divided in the wilderness [see *Numbers* 2].

In 13:14 the directions are listed in a different sequence: *HASHEM* said to *Abram* ... 'Raise now your eyes and look out from where you are: northward, southward, eastward and westward.'

Tosafos HaRosh Hadar Zekeinim conjectures that to Abraham, who was moving [from Bethel to Hebron] in a southerly direction, God first mentioned the direction he was leaving — north — and then the direction towards which he was heading — south. Similarly, to Jacob who was headed toward Charan, God first mentioned west, the direction from which he was coming, and then east, the direction in which he was heading. [This does not account, however, for the use of east-west to Abraham, and west-east here. See also the entirely different sequence in God's communication with Moses in *Deut.* 3:27: West, north, south, east — וצ"ע.]

And all the — וַיֹּצֵא כַח ... וּבְיָרֶעַךְ

families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and by your offspring.

And by your offspring was not said to Abraham [12:3] ... but it was added here because Jacob had no unworthy children (*Midrash HaBiur, Torah Sheleimah* §105).

This translation of וַיֹּצֵא כַח as *shall bless themselves* follows *Rashi's* interpretation of this expression throughout Scripture: A man will bless his son by saying, 'Be like Jacob and his descendants.' And, as *Rashi* concludes, 'this is the meaning wherever the expression appears.'

[See extensive commentary to the virtually parallel blessing to Abraham in 12:3 and 18:18.]

Among other interpretations are: And all the families of the earth *shall be blessed* through your righteousness [i.e., by your merit] and the righteousness of your offspring (*Targum Yonasan*; see *Ramban* to 12:3).^[2] All the families of the earth will wish to *intermingle* [from the Mishnaic verb ברך, graft] with you (*Rashbam*).

Radak interprets: Because of you and your offspring will all the families of the earth be blessed. Thus, the offspring of Jacob, by virtue of fulfilling God's commandments and recognizing Him Alone as Master of the universe, are responsible for the survival of the whole world.

15. — וְהָיָה אֲנֹכִי עִמָּךְ, [And] behold, I am with you.

Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim 3:18

1. He who delights in the Sabbath, is given an unbounded heritage, as it is written [*Isaiah* 54:13-14]: If ... you call the Sabbath a delight ... then I will ... feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The heritage of Jacob is mentioned because unlike the promises to Abraham and Isaac, the heritage promised to Jacob in our verse was boundless and unrestrained — [to the very ends of the earth, as it were] (*Shabbos* 118b).

In a homiletical vein, *Kli Yakar* notes that the boundless heritage of Jacob is mentioned both in connection with the Sabbath and, in our verse with the dust of the earth. Just as the Torah ordains that the land must rest every seventh year, so must Israel rest every seventh day.

28 families of the earth shall bless themselves by you
15 and by your offspring. ¹⁵ Behold, I am with you; I
will guard you wherever you go, and I will return

explains that this expression — which recurs often in Scripture (see for example 26:3) — is an explicit affirmation of Providence watching over the details of man's various activities according to the measure of man's perfection.

[From Jacob's later paraphrase of this promise in 32:13 as *אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ* it would appear that this was a general affirmation that God would 'do good' with him.]

Jacob required God's reassurance since he was afraid of Esau and Laban (*Rashi*).

According to *Ramban* [v. 12] God's assurance indicated that Jacob would be under God's *direct* protection, and not under the power

of the angels who perform God's will on earth [see *Abarbanel's* comment in this regard, cited at the end of v. 12.]

[Apparently this follows the usual interpretation that the pronoun *אֲנִי* (in comparison with the more subdued pronoun *אָנִי*) has an emphatic connotation: 'I Myself — and no other — am with you.']

וְשָׁמְרְתִּיךָ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר-תֵּלֵךְ — *And I will guard you wherever* [lit. *in all that*] *you go*.

In your flight from Esau, and during your refuge with Laban and your return from him (*Radak*).

[In the prophetic historical sense]: I will guard you (=your descendants) in your wanderings,

2. *Or HaChaim* interprets: The nations of the world will prosper from the very day of your arrival. He notes far-reaching implications of this blessing. As the Sages tell us, Charan was hard-pressed for water, but when Jacob arrived, water became abundant. Similarly, when Jacob arrived in Egypt the famine ended.

— This condition held true with Jacob's offspring as well: As the Sages note [*Sukkah* 55b], the nations of the world owed their prosperity to the descendants of Jacob who offered seventy bullocks every Succos [Tabernacles] in the Temple to atone for the seventy nations of the world. As Rav Yochanan said: 'Woe to the nations for they suffered a loss [by having destroyed the Temple] and do not realize the extent of the loss. While the Temple existed, the altar atoned for them, but now [that it is destroyed] who will atone for them?'

Ralbag synthesizes several views by rendering: *Through you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed* [i.e., blessings will proliferate among the families of the earth because of you and your offspring], because, in fact, when people will wish to bless one another they will say, 'May you be like Jacob and his children.'

[See also commentary to the *hispa'el* form, and *וְהִתְקַדְּכִי*, in 22:18 and 26:4.]

According to *Ha'amek Davar*: Even when Israel will be in exile, the families of the earth will bless themselves by you and your offspring inasmuch as the nations will recognize that the miracle of Jewish survival is possible only because its great Shepherd stands watch over it.

This would not have been as obvious were the world in peace and tranquility, for then the nations would attribute Israel's success to good fortune or natural prowess. Jacob's lot under Laban and Israel's lot in exile, however, were such that God's Providence was obvious to all.

R' Hirsch interprets that the blessing will emanate from a combination of Jacob and his offspring. The blessed spiritual influence of Jacob will be perceived by the nations only when successive generations of his offspring have demonstrated that their homes and their material labors have been founded upon the teachings and commandments of God.

Me'am Loez cites *Mishkenos Yaakov* who perceives a different implication in this verse: *וְהָיָה וְיָרַד בְּצֶפֶר הָאָרֶץ*, *Even when your descendants are downtrodden like the dust of the earth, וְיִפְרֹצְתָּ לָמָּה נִקְדָּמָה וְנִצְפָּנָה וְנִגְנָה*, *and you are scattered to the four corners of the earth — nevertheless, וְנִבְרָכִי בְּכָל מְשֻׁפָּחַת הָאָדָמָה וְבוֹרָהּ*, *all the families of the earth will be blessed* [or: *bless themselves* (*Rashi*)] *through you and your offspring*.

וְהִשְׁבַּתִּיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת בִּי לֹא
אֶעֱזֹבְךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר אִם עָשִׂיתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר־
טו דְּבַרְתִּי לָךְ: וַיִּקֶּץ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁנָתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר

וַיֹּצֵא
כח/טז

and rescue you from your exiles among the nations (*Ramban* to v. 12 in citing *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer's* interpretation that Jacob saw the future ascendancies of the Four Empires who would subjugate his descendants).

וְהִשְׁבַּתִּיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת – And I will return you to this soil.^[1]

[Both in the personal sense: when Esau's wrath will cool; and in the national sense: when God will redeem your descendants from their future exiles.]

This does not suggest that once God had returned Jacob to the land, he could not be exiled again, as was indeed the case when Jacob, in the face of famine, had to go to Egypt (*Haamek Davar*).

God said, 'to this soil' rather than 'to this land' to hint that eventually Jacob would return from Egypt to be buried in the soil of Eretz Yisrael (*Meshech Chochmah*).

כִּי לֹא אֶעֱזֹבְךָ – For I will not forsake you.

In the contextual sense: I will not forsake you while you are traveling, for a man needs more than usual protection while he is en route (*Rashbam*).

According to the *Midrash*, the concept of forsaking applies to sustenance as intimated in *Psalms* 37:25: I have not seen the righteous נָעֻב, forsaken [lack-

ing sustenance] nor his seed begging bread. Thus, by promising not to forsake him, God anticipated even Jacob's prayer for bread to eat and clothing to wear [v. 20].

עַד אֲשֶׁר אִם עָשִׂיתִי – Until [that/when] I have done.

I.e., fulfilled (*Radak*).

The Hebrew, which literally means until that/when (or: if) I have done is idiomatic since, as *Radak* observes, the words אִם עָשִׂיתִי would have sufficed; the redundancy implies emphasis. The translation in this context of אִם as when [rather than if] follows *Rashi*.

Sforno renders the phrase: while I have not yet done, the word עַד having the meaning of, while, as in *Song of Songs* 1:12: עַד שֶׁהִמְלִיךְ בַּמִּסְכָּה, while the king was still at his table. [He apparently interprets אִם (if) as meaning not. This follows *Sforno's* view in 14:23 that the word אִם (if), where it is not followed by a condition, has the implication of an oath, the meaning being will not. Thus in 14:23 the phrase אִם אֶקַּח means nor shall I take.]

Accordingly the assurance was that God would never forsake him nor his descendants since the promises He made concerning Jacob were eternal – embracing his descendants after him forever (*Radak*).

אֶת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּרְתִּי לָךְ – What I have spoken about you.

I.e. to Abraham. Whatever promises I made to Abraham concerning his descendants applied to you, not to Esau. I did not say to him יִצְחָק יִקְרָא לְךָ זֶרַע, 'Isaac' will be

1. The Holy One, Blessed be He, answers the righteous before they call upon Him, as it is written (*Isaiah* 65:24): טָרֵם יִקְרָאוּ וְאֲנִי אֶעֱנֶה: Before they call I will answer.

Thus, God told Jacob וְשָׁמְרִיךָ, and I will guard you, before Jacob said [v. 20] וְשָׁמְרִיךָ, and He will guard me; and He said וְהִשְׁבַּחְתִּיךָ, and I will bring you back, before Jacob said וְשָׁלוֹם, and I return in peace (*Midrash Ner Hasechalim – Torah Sheleimah* 110 [see *Bereishis Rabbah* 69:61]).

28 you to this soil; for I will not forsake you until I have
16 done what I have spoken about you.'

¹⁶ Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely

considered your offspring [which would have intimated that all of Isaac's descendants — including Esau — would be so regarded] but I said [21:12]: בְּיַצְחָק, 'in' Isaac, implying that only part of Isaac's offspring, not all of them, are included in the blessing. [This is explained in the footnote on p. 758] (Rashi).

According to Rashi, the flow of the assurance is: Do not fear Esau or Laban because I am with you and will not forsake you until I have completed what I promised regarding you. I promised Abraham to give this land to his offspring [12:7] and it is only through you — not through Esau — that this promise will be fulfilled. It is accordingly an integral part of the promise that I watch over you and assure your safe return (Ibn Caspi).

[Also inherent in this promise is that God would find a suitable wife for Jacob to assure the continuity of the Abrahamic blessing.]

R' David Cohen similarly explains that this was Abraham's intent when he told his servant Eliezer when dispatching him to find a wife for Isaac: HASHEM, God of heaven... who swore to me saying 'To your offspring will I give this land,' He will send His angel before you and you will take a wife for my son from there. That is, in order for God to fulfill His many promises concerning my progeny, He will surely bring success to your mission of finding a suitable wife to build the House of Israel.

The translation of דִּבַּרְתִּי לָךְ [lit. I have spoken to you] as I have spoken about you, follows Rashi who explains that whenever the verb דִּבַּר is followed by the pronoun לָךְ, לָהֶם or לָהֶם, it means to speak concerning rather than to. [This is enunciated more fully in Rashi's comm. to 24:7, page 900 s.v. וְאָשֶׁר דִּבַּר לִי]. Our verse proves this grammatical rule, Rashi continues, since the phrase cannot mean 'I have spoken to you,' because God had never spoken to Jacob before this occasion.

Others suggest that the phrase literally does mean: that I have just spoken to you. [Rashi does not subscribe to this view on grammatical grounds and because, had the reference been to the promises just given, it should have been put in present tense: אֲנִי מְדַבֵּר, אֲלֵיךְ, what I am telling you (Mizrachi)].

— The reference is to God's promise that He will bring him back to the soil (Rashbam).

— I will not forsake you until I will have fulfilled My promise that you [i.e., your descendants] shall spread out powerfully to the ends of the earth. Even after that, however, God's Mercy will prevail and He will remain in their midst as He promised [Leviticus 26:12]: וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם בְּתוֹכָם, And I will manifest Myself among you (Sforzo).¹¹

16. וַיִּקָּץ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁנָתוֹ — [And] Jacob awoke from his sleep.

Jacob did not awake and say 'It was a dream,' as if to say that it had

1. According to R' Hirsch, too, the reference is to the fulfillment of the just given blessings reflecting the destiny of Jacob's descendants for all time:

— הוּדָה אֲנִי עִמָּךְ, I am with you, and although you possess nothing but your staff, you may rely on My protection. Jacob was not given the promise of a great name as had Abraham (12:2), because, unlike Abraham, he was embarking on a long exile. Rather, he was promised protection from all the potential dangers of his new condition. He was further promised that God would not forsake either him or his descendants until the time comes for all the families of the earth to be blessed through Israel.

וַיֵּצֵא כַח/ז
אָבֵן יֵשׁ יְהוָה בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאָנֹכִי לֹא
יִדְעָתִי: וַיֵּרָא וַיֹּאמֶר מִה־נֹּרָא הַמָּקוֹם
הַזֶּה אֵין זֶה בִּי אִם־בֵּית אֱלֹהִים וְזֶה שְׁעַר

little significance. Instead he treated it as a prophecy, for when prophets are shown a vision in a dream, they recognize it to be a communication from God, as did Jacob when he awoke exclaiming: 'Surely HASHEM is present in this place' (*Moreh Nevuchim* 2:45).

The *Midrash* interprets homiletically: And Jacob awoke מִמְשָׁנּוֹ, from his studies [i.e. he had fallen asleep while studying (*Radal*).]

R' Hirsch explains יָקַץ as designating the moment when man has regenerated his exhausted body with sleep. It is as if he had returned himself to nature to replenish his depleted energies, then tears himself away from nature and returns again to an independent existence.

Surely — אָבֵן יֵשׁ ה' בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה
HASHEM is present in this place.

Targum Yonasan renders: Surely the Glory of God's *Shechinah* dwells in this place.

I.e., God is more imminent here than anywhere else (*Or HaChaim*).

Sforno interprets: Undoubtedly, this place is conducive to prophecy for I have seen a prophetic vision here even though I had not prepared myself for prophecy. The prophetic intellect is affected by changes of place and climate; some places can promote prophetic vision more than others. As the Sages have taught: אוֹרֵיָה רִאָּרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל מְחִיבִים, the atmosphere of Eretz Yisrael makes wise.

Thus, Jacob perceived that the prophetic spirit descended upon him solely because of the intrinsic nature of the place, even though he had not made the necessary preparations (*Malbim*).

Jacob's first realization was that God's Presence is in this place. He modestly assumes that the place, rather than he was responsible for God's proximity. His next realization was that God seeks bearers of His Presence among human beings (*R' Hirsch*).

The translation of אָבֵן as surely follows the implication of *Onkelos*, *Targum Yonasan* and *Radak* who, in rendering בְּקִשְׁשָׁא, in truth, interpret the word as an affirmative exclamation. The root word בָּן, yes, is itself affirmative, meaning in certain contexts correct or just, as for example *Numbers* 27:7: בָּן בָּנוֹת צִלְמֶהָר דִּבְרַת Joshua 2:4: בָּן בָּאִי בְּכָרְנֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים (*Karnei Or*).

See *Rashbam* who explains אָבֵן as composed of two words: אָךְ, but, it is so. Idiomatically the connotation is a conversive one: אָךְ not as I thought previously [that the place is not sacred], but בָּן it is so, that HASHEM is present in this place. This meaning of אָבֵן as expressing a new, changed perception is the sense of the word throughout Scripture. See *Exodus* 2:14: אָבֵן יוֹדַע הִכְרִי, surely [not as I thought that my deed had gone unnoticed] — rather the thing is known [i.e. Moses realized that he had been mistaken in his earlier belief that no one knew he had killed the Egyptian taskmaster].

And I did not know! — וְאָנֹכִי לֹא יִדְעָתִי

— Had I known I would not have slept here! (*Midrash; Rashi*).

Or HaChaim suggests that *Rashi's* interpretation is insufficient. Why should Jacob have regretted sleeping there? — Had he not slept he would not have had the prophetic dream! Furthermore, what did Jacob mean to imply by this exclamation that he had been unaware of the place's holiness; was it surprising that he was not aware of this hidden Presence of God? Did he then presume to be privy to God's ways?

28 *HASHEM is present in this place and I did not know!*
17 ¹⁷ *And he became frightened and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God and this is the gate of the heavens!'*

Rather, the exclamation reflects Jacob's understanding in retrospect that the sudden sunset upon his arrival had been Divinely prepared in order to have him there for the prophecy. Thus, what he had not comprehended earlier now became clear to him. The implication is that *had he known*, he would have prepared himself to reach the degree of prophecy to which such a place is conducive. Moreover, he bemoaned his lack of awareness because, with adequate preparation, he might have prophesied while *awake* and would have avoided sleeping in that holy place.

[Although certain *Midrashim* cited above would seem to imply that Jacob *did* know that he was at the site of his father's *Akeidah* — which his grandfather named HASHEM Yireh [22:14] implying that God reveals Himself prophetically there — Jacob's remark implies he had been unaware of the full holiness of the place.]

Akeidas Yitzchak interprets: I was unaware that God's presence is more manifest in some places than in others.

Ibn Ezra interprets similarly and concludes that he cannot expound upon the sublime mystery that God manifests Himself in some places more than in others, although *the whole world is full of His Glory* [Isaiah 6:3].

17. וַיִּירָא. — [And] he became frightened.

He feared for himself because he might not have comported himself with the dignity proper to so sacred a site (*Radak*).

HaKsav V'HaKabbalah suggests that it was not *fear of punishment* like that which Jacob experienced further in 33:8. Rather, the connotation of this fear is that Jacob ex-

perienced a feeling of *reverential awe* in the sense of וּמִקְדָּשִׁי תִירָאוּ, *revere* [lit. *fear*] *My Sanctuary* (Lev. 19:30).

That he had received the prophetic inspiration though he was unprepared, instilled within him an awe of the immense holiness of the place (*Malbim*).

מָה נוֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה — *How awesome is this place!*

The place in which I have been shown such a great vision certainly commands the awe befitting so holy a place (*Radak*).

Onkelos renders: מָה רָחִילוֹ, אֶתְרָא הָרִין. *O the fearfulness of this place!* רָחִילוֹ, *fearfulness*, is a noun (שם רָחַר) [although it ends with a ו which, as a verbal suffix, usually indicates the past-tense third person plural: *How they feared this place*]. This noun-usage is similar to the nouns סוֹכְלָתָנוּ, *understanding* [Exodus 31:3], and כֶּסֶד, *garment* (*Rashi*).

[The above interpretation of *Rashi's* understanding of *Onkelos* follows *Mizrachi*. Our translation *How awesome is this place* follows *Gur Aryeh* and *Heidenheim* who take שם רָחַר here to signify an *adjective* (= שם תואר) since the Hebrew word נוֹרָא is really a *Niphal* participle.]

אֵין זֶה בִּי אִמְבִּיט אֱלֹהִים — *This is none other than the abode* [lit. *house*] *of God*.

— This is not an ordinary place, but the Sanctuary of God's Name, a suitable place for prayer (*Targum Yonasan*).

That is, this is a place where man

should pray in time of need, since it had been selected for that purpose (*Ibn Ezra*).⁽¹⁾

In the context of the awesomeness of the place, Jacob intentionally used the Name אֱלֹהִים, *God*, which signifies the Source of awe, as it says [Ecclesiastes 3:14]: *God [אֱלֹהִים] has acted so that man should stand in awe [אֵיירא] of Him (Or HaChaim)* – [and as the *Talmud* explains (*Shabbos* 31b): God's whole purpose in creating the world was that man should stand in awe of Him!]

וְהָיָה שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם – *And this is the gate of the heavens.*

– A propitious place for prayer (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).

It is the gate through which prayers and sacrifices ascend to heaven (*Rashi*; *Ramban*).

Of course this description is figurative; the heavens have no gates in the literal sense (*Mizrachi*).

Rashi adds that Midrashically the gate at Bethel-Jerusalem implies that the Heavenly Temple is situated immediately opposite the Earthly Temple. [Hence the figurative designation for that site as 'the gate of the heavens' is quite appropriate (*Nachlas Yitzchak*).]

In summation, the Midrashic connotation would be: *this*, i.e. the Temple on earth, is the *Abode of God*, and *this*, i.e. the Heavenly Temple, is the *gate of the heavens* (*Gur Aryeh*).

The Midrash [as explained by *Maharzu*] perceives this verse as a dialogue: Jacob said, 'This is ... the *Abode of God*,' and God replied, 'This is the *gate of the heavens* – and will be opened for many other righteous men like you.'

§ The site of Jacob's dream.

As noted earlier, the Sages, in their various *Talmudic* and *Midrashic* interpretations of this narrative maintain that the site at which Jacob slept was Mount Moriah, where Isaac was bound to the altar by Abraham, and where the future Temple in Jerusalem would be built. The text of the Torah would seem to imply, however, that the place was Luz-Bethel, not Jerusalem. In the following Midrashic dissertation, accordingly, *Rashi* attempts to reconcile the various Rabbinic views with the simple sense of the narrative (*Sefer HaZikaron*).

[The complexity of the treatment given the subject by *Rashi* and *Ramban* has caused many students of *Chumash* to forgo serious study of the question. It is felt, therefore, that a complete discussion of the topic, although lengthy, would be a valuable contribution.]

□ *Rashi* quotes the *Midrash*: Rav Yose ben Zimra said, the ladder stood in Beer Sheba and [the middle of] its slope was over the site of the Temple.

[The above bracketed words 'the middle of' are inserted by *Rashi* based on his interpretation of the *Midrash*.]

Rashi goes on to explain his contention that the middle of the ladder was over Jerusalem. Bethel, over which Jacob saw the ladder's top, is north of Jerusalem while Beersheba where Jacob saw its base, is to the south. It follows, therefore, that the mid-point of the ladder's slope was over Jerusalem, the site of the future Temple.

Although the text (next verse) seems to imply that Jacob spent the night in Luz, *Rashi* proceeds to cite two *Talmudic* interpretations indicating that he was in Jerusalem. The first of these is the interpretation [*Sanhedrin* 95b; *Chullin* 91b, (cited above in v. 11 s.v. שָׁם)] that Jacob wished to proceed

1. The word בית does not necessarily mean house or abode in the structural sense. Rather it denotes a physical or spiritual entity which contains something. Thus, the inside of a container is called בית [as is a family which comprises many members all of whom are formed by and share the values of the family unit]. In this sense, the as-yet-unbuilt place was called an *abode* because there was a unique suitability for prayer and holiness within its boundaries (*Or Yohei*).

from the place mentioned in v. 11 and that God said: 'This righteous man has come to My habitation [an obvious reference to Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem], shall I allow him to depart without spending the night?' [Thereupon, the Talmud records God caused the sun to set prematurely in order to detain Jacob.] The second Talmudic interpretation is the implication from *Pesachim* 88a [cited below] that Jacob gave the name Bethel to Jerusalem rather than to Luz as the text would seem to indicate.

To reconcile this Rabbinic view [Bethel/Luz = Jerusalem] with the simple meaning of the text, [Bethel/Luz is distinct from Jerusalem], *Rashi* cites the following Talmudic interpretation [*Chullin* 91b]: וַיֵּלֶךְ הָרְחֵק, he went to Charan, (v. 10), means that when Jacob departed from Beersheba he actually arrived in Charan. Then, he remorsefully said, 'Is it possible that I passed the place where my father prayed [i.e. Mount Moriah] without myself praying there?' He resolved to return there, and immediately קפצה לוֹ הָאֶרֶץ, the earth 'contracted' for him, with the result that וַיִּפְגַּע בְּמָקוֹם, he encountered the place (א, 11).¹¹

Rashi explains the latter to mean that when Jacob reached Charan he decided to return to Mt. Moriah, and traveled as far as Luz-Bethel, whereupon קפצה לוֹ הָאֶרֶץ, literally the earth 'jumped toward him' — i.e., Mount Moriah was removed from its place and transported toward Jacob. The two met in Luz-Bethel. This is the implication of the expression וַיִּפְגַּע בְּמָקוֹם, he encountered the place, since, as *Rashi* explains in v. 11, the term וַיִּפְגַּע is used to denote the encounter of two objects [in this case, Jacob and the Temple Mount] moving toward one another.

[Thus, in effect, *Rashi* in our verse differs from the common interpretation of קפיצת הארץ, which is generally un-

derstood to mean *not* that a site was uprooted and jumped toward someone, but that a person covered a great distance in a surprisingly short time because the earth contracted, so to speak, to speed his arrival (*Sefer HaZikaron*).]

Accordingly, *Rashi* proves Midrashically that because the earth 'jumped' toward him, Jacob was in Luz-Bethel and Moriah-Jerusalem at the same time. [Accordingly, both places in effect, were brought to one site so that Jacob could pray at both simultaneously (*Mizrachi*)]. Because Mt. Moriah had been transported to Luz, the Talmud refers to the site as God's habitation and implies that the place which Jacob named Bethel was indeed Jerusalem.

[Some editions of *Rashi* conclude that this is not the Bethel near Ai mentioned in 12:8, but that Bethel is a descriptive term meaning 'House of God.' Jacob gave that description to Luz because the future site of the Temple 'met' him there (See *Maharsha*, *Chullin* 91b and *Ramban* (b) below).]

Rashi offers a further proof that the site named Bethel by Jacob was indeed Mt. Moriah: In interpreting the verse, Come let us go to the mountain of HASHEM, and the House of God of Jacob (*Micah* 4:2), the Talmud (*Pesachim* 88b) explains that in that context HASHEM is referred to specifically as the God of Jacob, because Jacob, in our verse, gave the name house to the site of the future Temple. Clearly, therefore, the Sages understand the Bethel of our verse as a reference to Jerusalem.

[Conclusions: (a) Luz was to the north of Jerusalem; (b) The meaning of קפיצת הארץ in this case is that Mount Moriah 'jumped' toward Jacob and settled in Luz where Jacob prayed. It was that dual holy site, Moriah-Luz, where Jacob spent the night, dreamt, and erected the stone, which he named Bethel. (c) This is why the Sages referred to Luz-Bethel as God's 'habita-

1. *Rashi* explains: Should you ask, why did God not detain Jacob at the site of the Temple earlier, when he passed it on his outward journey from Beer Sheba to Charan? — The answer is: If it never entered Jacob's mind to pray at the place where his fathers prayed, why should Heaven make him stop there?

tion', and why, although he was in Luz, Jacob is described as having given the name Bethel to *Jerusalem*.]

□ Ramban cites Rashi's interpretation and differs with him on several counts:

(a) Ramban maintains that קפצת הארץ can mean only that the earth contracted for him as the phrase is interpreted in the case of Eliezer [see on 24:42]; hence, the Temple Mount was not transported to meet him at Luz. Chullin 91b is to be interpreted that as soon as Jacob resolved to return to the site where his fathers prayed, he was speeded there. For, if Rashi is correct, why should the Temple Mount immediately 'spring' to Bethel (and wait while Jacob journeyed for several days to arrive there (*Abraham*)); why did it not spring all the way to Charan to spare Jacob the trip to Luz? [*Mizrachi* answers this objection by explaining that according to Rashi the Temple Mount 'jumped' to the easternmost border of Eretz Yisrael; to have 'jumped' all the way to Charan would have taken the Temple Mount outside the Holy Land!]

(b) Ramban further counters that Bethel, as noted in 12:8, was at the western part of Eretz Yisrael; how can Rashi imply that Bethel was in the easterly direction toward Charan? [*Mizrachi* answers that the Luz which Jacob named was not the Bethel near Ai mentioned in 12:8. This site was on the northeastern side of Jerusalem and Jacob named it Bethel — House of God — to commemorate that the Temple Mount had 'jumped' there to meet him. *Maharsha* in Chullin 91b interprets similarly.]

(c) What is the significance of the center of a ladder's slope? [*Gur Aryeh* answers that the center was over Jerusalem to signify that the Temple was the central point of this 'ladder' which spanned heaven and earth. (Nevertheless, *Gur Aryeh* agrees with Ramban that Rashi's interpretation of

R' Yose ben Zimra's Midrashic exposition of the sloping ladder does not blend with the contextual flow of the *Midrash*.)]

Based on the *Midrashim*, Ramban suggests that Isaac lived in Hebron at the time [see 35:27]. Before departing for Charan, Jacob went to Beer Sheba to seek Divine permission to leave the Land. It was there, according to R' Yose ben Zimra, that he dreamt and received tacit permission to depart, as implied by the assurance in v. 15. Thus, the foot of the ladder was in Beer Sheba where he lay, and the end of the slope (which is the top of the ladder) reached a point opposite the Temple, supported in heaven at the gate through which the angels enter and exit. Jacob perceived God standing over him and he knew that Beer Sheba was the gate of heaven — because it was there that his prayer had been offered and accepted — and the Temple was the House of God. He erected the monument not in Beer Sheba but in Bethel, formerly Luz, which was Jerusalem, opposite the head of the ladder's slope. [He carried the monument there from Beer Sheba (*Radai*).] Thus, R' Yose ben Zimra would distinguish between the Bethel—Jerusalem named now by Jacob, and the Bethel near Ai which, as 12:8 implies, already carried that name prior to Abraham's time.

[It is not clear, according to this interpretation why this Bethel is identified in v. 19 and 35:6 with the unknown site Luz rather than Jerusalem. Possibly Luz, in this view, was not a place name, but an adjective. This view is supported by *Midrash HaGadol* which comments: From the time of Jacob onward it was Bethel, the House of God, but previously it was Luz, 'perverse' and 'estranged' from God. Thus, the verse tells us not that the city had been called Luz earlier, but that it was described as 'estranged' from the possibility of holiness.]

Further, Ramban proceeds to cite the differing view of R' Yehudah ben R' Simon in the *Midrash* who maintains

that 'The ladder stood at the *Temple site* and its slope reached *Bethel*.' Ramban explains that according to this view: (a) The 'place' where Jacob was detained by the premature setting of the sun was *Mount Moriah*; (b) as the *Talmud* relates (*Chullin* 91b and *Sanhedrin* 95b) Jacob had gone all the way to *Charan* when he decided to return to the place where his fathers had prayed. Thereupon the earth 'contracted' for him and miraculously transported him there in a twinkling. When Jacob awoke, he exclaimed that the place where he had slept was the House of God, an excellent site for prayer. The site opposite the slope of the ladder — *Bethel* in *Luz* where he erected the pillar — was the gate of heaven and a suitable place for the service of God since 'it is the opinion of all the Rabbis that he erected it [the pillar] opposite the slope of the ladder.'

[Thus, according to this view, *Bethel-Luz* is distinct from *Moriah*; but this interpretation assumes (as *Radal* explains), that Jacob took the coalesced stones which had lain around his head and transported them to *Bethel-Luz*. That he perceived it to be a sacred place is evidenced by the reverence Jacob showed for the place many years later when he returned to *Eretz Yisrael* (see chap. 35).]

Finally, *Ramban* cites *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* as further proof for this latter view of R' Simon that *Mount Moriah* was the 'place' where the sun set prematurely, and where Jacob spent the night, gathered the stones from the altar on which his father had been bound, and saw the vision. When Jacob awoke, he declared that the House of God was there, and exclaimed, *How awesome is this place!* From this we learn that whoever prays in *Jerusalem* is as if he prays before *הכבוד*, the *Throne of Glory*, for the gate of heaven is open there to receive the prayers of *Israel*. Jacob found that the stones on which he rested were coalesced into one and so he

set it up as a pillar. Then God caused the stone to be sunk deep into the earth. This stone is called *שֹׁהַן*, *The Foundation Stone*, since it is the center of the earth, and it forms the foundation of the Temple. [This differs from the view (cf. *Yoma* 54b and *Ramban* to 1:2) that the *Foundation Stone* was the first part of earth to be created and from which the rest of earth sprang forth. See also footnote to v. 13.] From *Moriah*, the earth 'contracted' for Jacob and he found himself in *Charan* in a twinkling of an eye.

[According to the latter, again, *Bethel* is identified with *Mount Moriah* in *Jerusalem*, which leaves unexplained why the Torah in v. 19 uses the reference name *Luz* instead of *Jerusalem* unless, as suggested above, *Luz* is an adjective describing *Moriah*, rather than a proper noun. See *Chizkuni*; *Mizrachi*; and *Gur Aryeh*.]

18. וַיִּשְׁכֶּם יַעֲקֹב בֶּבֶקֶר. — [And] Jacob arose early in the morning.

[It is noteworthy that after waking from his dream and exclaiming how awesome the place was, Jacob apparently waited until daybreak, when he rose up early in the morning. Until then, he made no effort to set up the pillar and pray in commemoration of the auspicious vision of the evening.]

Meshech Chochmah interprets Jacob's delay until morning in consonance with the rabbinic interpretation that the deeds of the Patriarchs were symbolic of the deeds of their descendants. Jacob's erection of the altar foreshadowed the construction of the Temple on this very site by his descendants. Jacob did not set up the altar at night [after he initially awoke from his dream (v. 17), but waited until

וַיִּצַח כַּח/יט הָאֶבֶן אֲשֶׁר-שָׂם מֶרְאֲשֵׁיתוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ יט מִצְבֵּה וַיִּצֶק שֶׁמֶן עַל-רֹאשָׁהּ: וַיִּקְרָא

he arose early in the morning] since the Sanctuary may not be constructed at night as the Sages [Shevuos 15:2] derived from Numbers 9:15: On the 'day' that the Tabernacle was erected.

The early morning is a propitious time for prayer and sacrifice. It was during his prayers that Jacob verbalized his vow of the following verses (*Haamek Davar*).

וַיִּקַּח אֶת הָאֶבֶן אֲשֶׁר שָׂם מֶרְאֲשֵׁיתוֹ —
And [he] took the stone that he had placed around his head.

The stone is singular. The many stones he had collected earlier (v. 11) had coalesced into one stone (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*; see *comm.* to v. 11).

This stone, as noted by the *Midrashim* above [*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* cited in v. 11], symbolized the unity of the future tribes of Israel (*Malbim*).

According to Abaye in *Zevachim* 116b, one may not construct an altar from materials used for such secular purposes as that to which these stones had been put by Jacob. However, such materials were permitted for a *bamah* [lit. high place, a private altar] the use of which was permissible before the establishment of a central Sanctuary] (*Tur*).

וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ מִצְבֵּה — And [he] set it up [lit. placed it] as a pillar [more literally: standing stone.]

[Cf. dissertation in v. 17 "The site of Jacob's dreams" for the various views of where Jacob set up this pillar. According to several of the Midrashic opinions cited there,

Jacob carried the stone from the place he slept — Beer Sheba or Mount Moriah (see *Ramban* there) — to the site he now named Bethel.]

According to *Sforno* the implication of *set* is that Jacob consecrated the stone [in the sense of *set it aside* for future use] so that on his return [when presumably he would not be pursued] he would erect it. Indeed, Scripture attests that he later did [see 34:14].

§Permissibility of the pillar

[The Sages often emphasize that the Patriarchs scrupulously observed the Torah even before it was given. How, then, could Jacob have set up a pillar, inasmuch as the Torah later forbade such pillars and ordered them destroyed (*Exod.* 23:24; *Lev.* 26:1; *Deut.* 16:22)]?

The answer lies in the dissertation on the subject of the Patriarchs' observance of the Torah, see above, page 1083, where *Ramban* to 26:5 explains that in the time of the Patriarchs the erection of pillars was permitted; it became prohibited only later when such forms of sacrificial service became particularly associated with heathen idolatry (see *Sifre* to *Deut.* 16:22).] Note in this connection that Moses also set up pillars (*Exodus* 24:4).

Ramban cites *Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah* 4:5 [see also *Rashi* to *Deut.* 12:3] that the difference between *מצבה*, a pillar and *מזבח*, an altar, is that the former consists of one stone while the latter is composed of many stones. It would seem that pillars were used for libations but not for sacrifices, whereas altars were used for sacrifices. Since the Canaanites had established pillars for their idolatrous cult worship to a greater extent than altars, God later prohibited the erection of pillars. Though they

were commanded to destroy the Canaanites' altars as well, God did not prohibit the Israelites from making their own altars. Perhaps God did not want to prohibit [opportunity for private sacrifices] entirely, and allowed them altars, which are fit for both libations and sacrifices.

R' Hirsch perceives a philosophical concept in the changing status of pillars. A pillar, since it is a single, natural stone unaltered by man, represents nature. An altar, because it is built of many stones, represents man's alteration of the raw material of nature. Before the Torah was given, God's rule was evident in man's subservience to nature. The use of a pillar, therefore, symbolized man's unaltered submission to God's will. With the giving of the Torah, however, God wished to be known by man's utilization of nature's bounty to do His will. This is symbolized by the use of altars, but not pillars, which imply helpless obedience to nature.

וַיִּצֶק שֶׁמֶן עַל רֹאשׁוֹ — Then [lit. and] he poured oil on its top.

To distinguish this stone from all others, so that on his return he might recognize the site and build an altar there. [He could not tarry there now to build an altar since he feared Esau's pursuit.] He used oil since its penetrating stain would not wash away in rainy weather, and it would remain recognizable. Perhaps he poured the oil as an act of service

just as he did upon his return [35:14] similar to נִסְךְ הַיַּיִן, libations of wine. All these acts displayed proprietorship in the land since no one disturbed his monument, and the residents concurred in his changing the name of the area from Luz to Bethel (*Radak*; similarly *Ibn Ezra*; *Ralbag*; R' Bachya cites the first interpretation in the name of R' Saadiah Gaon).

[Possibly, Jacob wished to show ownership of the stone to deter the idolatrous Canaanites from coming upon and utilizing this stone for their worship. They would not have performed acts of idolatry with an object used in the service of another deity.]

Rashbam suggests that the oil served to consecrate the stone so that it could be used for sacrifices on his return. Such was the requirement in the case of the Tabernacle and its utensils of which it is written [Numbers 7:1]: he anointed them and consecrated them.⁽¹⁾

According to *Malbim*, who notes that the coalesced stone represents the unity of Jacob's progeny, the oil represents God's spiritual bounty. Thus, Jacob symbolized that God's blessing would descend upon Israel if it were to be unified.

Jacob had virtually nothing with him but his staff; where did he get oil?

1. R' Hirsch, too, offers both possible interpretations of Jacob's pouring of oil — as consecration or as libation — but he explains the philosophical intent of the two deeds. When oil is mixed with another liquid, it remains apart. This represents the separate status of the anointed object; it is set apart and raised above all others. In the sense of libation, if wine is used, it represents the concept that all joy [wine Talmudically represents joy] derives from God. If water is used, it represents that acknowledgment that even such an insignificant gift as a drop of water is God's gift. An oil libation demonstrates one's recognition that health and well-being come from God.

אֶת־שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הָהוּא בֵּית־אֵל וְאוֹלָם כ לֹא שֵׁם־הָעִיר לְרֹאשָׁנָה: וַיִּדְרֹךְ יַעֲקֹב נֶדֶר

וַיִּצָא
כח/כ

— *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* suggests that some anointing-oil miraculously flowed to him from heaven. [Thus he anointed only its top (*Radal*)]. Cf. *Midrash Rabbah* that the oil was supplied to him from heaven in abundance.

Pesikta Zutresa and *Sechel Tov* conjecture that Jacob secured the oil from the city closest to that site.

[In 31:13 Jacob's anointing the stone is referred to with the verb מָשַׁח, which Rashi explains in the sense of elevating in eminence as in the anointment of a king. There, Jacob consecrated the stone for use as an altar.]

19. וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם הָהוּא בֵּית־אֵל — *And he named that place Bethel* [lit. *House of God*].

According to the various opinions enumerated in the commentary to verse 17, the site designated as Bethel can refer either to:

- (a) the city of Bethel near Ai mentioned in 13:8;
- (b) a city bearing the same name but further north in the later territory of Joseph [*Rashi* in *Josh.* 18:13 makes this distinction];
- (c) not a city, but the designation — *House of God* — given to the dual site Jerusalem-Luz;
- (d) Mount Moriah which was miraculously uprooted and 'jumped' to meet Jacob in Luz when he returned from Charan to pray at the site where his fathers prayed;
- (e) a site identified with Jerusalem since it contained the House of God.

The *Vilna Gaon* to *Joshua* 16:2 lists three different locations that Jacob named Bethel: the site of his dream (here); *El Bethel* (35:7); and *Elohim Bethel* (35:15). *Mount Bethel* (*Joshua* 16:1) refers to the site [near Ai] which was already

called Bethel in Abraham's time (13:8).

Rashbam suggests that it was the outskirts of the city, the site where Jacob slept, that he named Bethel. The city itself, too, subsequently came to be called by that name.

[And] — וְאוֹלָם לֹא שֵׁם הָעִיר לְרֹאשָׁנָה *Luz was the city's name originally.*

The *Talmud* and *Midrashim* give many interpretations to the significance of the name Luz, a selection of which follows:

[However, many commentators suggest that the reference is to the Luz mentioned in *Judges* 1:24, which they claim is different from the Luz-Bethel mentioned here. *Torah Sheleimah* (§138 and §140) points out, however, that in current editions of *Midrash Rabbah* these comments are attached to the mention of Luz in our verse. Others suggest that the Luz mentioned in *Judges* 1:24 is our Luz, and it was to it that the *Midrashic* interpretations applied. Later, when the original Luz was destroyed (*ibid.* v. 25) the special properties attributed to the old city became manifest in the new city named Luz (*ibid.* v. 26).]

The word Luz literally means *almond tree*. According to the *Midrash*, an almond tree concealed the city's entrance, keeping outsiders away [see *Judges* 1:25]. The tree was hollow, and through it one entered a cave which led to the entrance of the city.

Luz is also the Aramaic name for the *os coccyx*, the 'nut' of the spinal column. The Rabbis explained that this is the only part of the body that is indestructible. This one bone does not decompose after death, and it will form the nucleus for the resurrection of the body [תְּחִיית הַמֵּתִים] (see *VaYikra Rabbah* 17, and *Koheles Rabbah* 12).

that place Bethel. However, Luz was the city's name originally.

²⁰ Then Jacob took a vow, saying, 'If God will be

Just as God made this one *luz* bone impervious to the ravages of death, God set aside one spot on earth — *Luz* — where the Angel of Death has no power, and where people do not die. When a person was very old, and wanted to die, he would leave the city and there he would die [see *Sotah* 46b]. [As pointed out above, the city's entrance remained hidden — known only to its inhabitants — until the incident recorded in *Judges* 1:25.] It was, furthermore, in *Luz* where the *techeles* was dyed. It was not overthrown in Sennacherib's invasion, nor razed to the ground in Nebuchadnezzar's. The location of the city is now unknown.

According to *Midrash HaGadol* cited in the footnote to v. 17, *Luz* in this case was not the name of a place but an adjective describing the perverse estrangement from God [גילול ומלח] that prevailed there before Jacob's time when the site was designated *Bethel* — the House of God.

20. Jacob's vow.

וַיִּדָּר יַעֲקֹב בְּדָר לֵאמֹר — Then [lit. and] Jacob took [lit. vowed] a vow, saying.

As noted often in the commentary [see, for example 15:1] the word *לֵאמֹר*, saying (lit. to say) indicates that the statement was intended to be transmitted to others. In this case, Jacob was alone and there was no one to whom the message could be conveyed. The *Midrash*, therefore, interprets that Jacob undertook a vow at this time *לֵאמֹר*, to say, by example, to later generations that they should follow suit and vow to perform a righteous act in times of distress, and moreover that it is meritorious to do so.^[1]

Or *HaChaim* suggests that *לֵאמֹר*, saying, implies that Jacob actually verbalized his vow. A contemplated vow is ineffective.

Why are vows efficacious in times of trouble?

Yafeh Toar explains that although one does not actually do anything when he makes a vow, the merit of the intended good deed protects him and rescues him from trouble. As the Sages also proclaimed [*Kiddushin* 40a]: מַחֲשַׁבָּה טוֹבָה הַקִּבִּי' מְצַרְפָּה לַמַּעֲשֵׂה, God considers a good intention as tantamount to a deed.

1. [It is generally the practice to refrain from taking vows (see *Ecclesiastes* 5:4) for as the Sages noted (*Nedarim* 77b), it is better for a good deed to be done without having taken a vow to do it; and as *Ran* to *Nedarim* 22a comments, the Sages compare one who makes a vow to one who sinfully erects a *בֵּיתָא*, private altar, when such altars are forbidden (*Deut.* 12:13; see *Ramban* above, v. 18) because both sins are of a similar nature: both perpetrators think they can please God by doing something beyond what He has commanded. Nevertheless, we derive from here that it is meritorious to undertake a vow to perform a meritorious or charitable act in times of distress.]

Torah Temimah notes that in citing this *Midrash*, *Tosafos Chullin* 2b implies that not only is it permissible to make a vow in times of distress but meritorious. He finds it noteworthy, however, that as codified in *Yoreh Deah* # 203, the language used for this *halachah* is that oaths are 'permissible,' rather than 'meritorious,' at such times.

לֹאֲמַר אִם־יְהִיֶּה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי וְשָׁמְרָנִי
בְּדֶרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִכִּי הוֹלֵךְ וְנִתְּנָלִי
כֹּחַ לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּבִגְד לְלַבֵּשׁ: וְשִׁבְתִּי בְשָׁלוֹם
אֶל־בֵּית אָבִי וְהָיָה יְהוָה לִי לֵאלֹהִים:

וּצֵא
כח/כא

The commentators emphasize, however, that in general — not in times of distress — one should refrain from taking a vow because one can incur severe punishment if he does not fulfill the pledge. Therefore, many people say בְּלִי נָדָר, 'without a vow,' when expressing their intention to perform a deed.

The Midrash notes additionally that Jacob was the first to offer a vow. Therefore he is credited with formulating the solemn, binding nature of vows. Thus in Psalms [132:2]: *How he swore unto HASHEM, and vowed unto the Mighty One of Jacob*, it is not Abraham or Isaac who is mentioned, but Jacob.

אִם יְהִיֶּה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי — *If God will be with me.*

— I.e., if He will fulfill His promises to be with me [v. 15] (Rashi).

Ramban explains that Jacob's mode of expression, 'if' God will..., does not imply that Jacob doubted God's promise. Rather, Jacob was apprehensive that his own sins might cause the forfeiture of the promises [שָׁמָּה יִגְרַם הַחֲטָא]. (See *comm.* and footnote to 32:8.)

This follows the Midrash which notes that after God specifically promised Jacob to be with him [v. 15], Jacob nevertheless said: *If God will be with me*, implying that there is no assurance for the righteous in this world [as Ramban explains in the footnote to 15:2, page 506, the righteous never take their righteousness for granted and are

never confident in this world. See also Rashi and *comm.* to 32:10,11 where Jacob's later apprehensions are similarly dealt with and explained.]

In the literal sense, however, Ramban goes on to suggest [like Rashi in v. 15 above] that the word אִם in this context does not express doubt — 'if' it occurs — but has the meaning of *when* it shall occur, as in Numbers 36:4: *When [ואם] there shall be the jubilee of the children of Israel*. Thus, Jacob implied: *When God's promises will be fulfilled, etc.*

Sforno interprets the intent to be: *If God will be with me and keep me from those obstacles which lead man astray from Him, as the Sages [Eruvin 41b] proclaimed: 'Three things deprive a man of his senses and of a knowledge of his Creator: Idolators, an evil spirit, and oppressive poverty.'* [Sforno ties these in with the following conditions of the vow; see further.]

— וְשָׁמְרָנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִכִּי הוֹלֵךְ — [And if He] will guard me on this way that I am going.

— As He said [v. 5]: *And I will guard you wherever you go* (Rashi).

— *If He guards me* from the evil persons [=the idolators referred to above] who force one to reject Him (Sforno).

The Sages in the Midrash explain — by citing parallel allusions throughout Scripture — that Jacob's various expressions intimated protection from idolatry, adultery, bloodshed, and slander.

— וְנִתְּנָלִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּבִגְד לְלַבֵּשׁ — [And if He] will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear.

As He said [ibid.]: *For I will not forsake you*. [This promise intimated protection from hunger]

28 with me, will guard me on this way that I am going;
 21 will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear; ²¹ and I
 return in peace to my father's house, and HASHEM

since one who is forced to beg for bread is called *forsaken*, as in *Psalms* 37:25, *I have never seen a righteous man forsaken* (נִעָזַב) *nor his children begging for bread* (Rashi: see Midrash cited to v. 15 s.v. כִּי לֹא אֶעֱזֹב).

The commentators explain that Rashi's intent is that God would provide all Jacob's daily necessities. Keeping him from *hunger for bread* in the literal sense, was but one intimation of God's earlier promise not to 'forsake' him. Actually, keeping him *clothed and generally maintained* was implicit in that blessing as well; hence Jacob's inclusion of *clothes to wear* although it had not been explicitly promised him.

— And if He will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear so that poverty will not lead me to rebel (Sforno).

Radak notes that Jacob asked only for life's barest necessities — bread and clothing; he asked for no luxuries. He had no need to ask for water since that is usually freely available to travelers.

21. וְשָׁבְתִי בְּשָׁלוֹם אֶל-בֵּית אָבִי — And [if] I return in peace [i.e., safely (Radak)] to my father's house.

— As He said [v. 15]: *I will bring you back to this soil* (Rashi).

Rashi explains בְּשָׁלוֹם [in peace] to imply: 'perfect' [שָׁלֵם] from sin; that I do not learn from Laban's ways.

— This is intimated by God's earlier promise to *bring him back to this soil*; implicit in this was that God return him

in a state of sinlessness, as he had left (*Gur Aryeh*). If Jacob were not to return sinless, none of the promises God spoke concerning him [v. 15] to Abraham could have found fulfillment in him or his progeny (*Nachalas Yitzchak*).

Since Jacob attributed the return to his own power: And I will return, it was necessary for him to add בְּשָׁלוֹם [in peace; sinless] (*Gur Aryeh*). The physical return would be in God's hands; the sinlessness would be in Jacob's since 'Everything is in the hands of Heaven but the fear of Heaven' (*Divrei David*; see *Berachos* 33b).

Furthermore, though God had promised to bring Jacob back to the soil, this did not necessarily mean בְּשָׁלוֹם, in peace, i.e., whole in body rather than wounded. Furthermore, God promised only to return him to the soil [i.e., to the country itself]. Jacob added to my father's house (*Haamek Davar*).

This follows Sforno, who explains that בְּשָׁלוֹם, in peace, refers to coming back spiritually whole, not suffering from diseases [=the evil spirit referred to above] which keep men away from Him.

[Cf. 33:18.]

Why did Jacob attribute this act to himself — and 'I' will return — rather than to God — and He will bring me back — which would have been more in consonance with the other conditions?

Gur Aryeh comments that it would have been disrespectful for Jacob to have ascribed to God the physical chore of bringing him back, as if He were Jacob's porter; therefore, he said 'I' will return. This alteration also accounts for Jacob's addition of the word בְּשָׁלוֹם, in peace. By definition, whatever God does is perfect; when God promised to return Jacob, it was implicit that His return would be in a state of peace and perfec-

ויצא כח/כב בב והאבן הזאת אשר-שמתי מצבה יהיה בית אלהים וכל אשר תתן-לי עשר

tion. This cannot be said, however, of a human agency. When Jacob ascribed the return to himself, therefore, he had to add the hope that it would be in peace.

והנה ה' לי לאלהים — And HASHEM will be a God to me.

As reflected in the translation, Rashi interprets this as one of the conditions set by Jacob: And [if] HASHEM will be a God to me. Jacob asked that God cause His Name to rest upon his offspring forever in the sense that no blemish will be found in his posterity. This alludes to God's promise above [v. 15]: that which I have spoken regarding you, which refers to the promise made to Abraham [17:7]: to be a God to you and to your offspring after you.

Rashi offers this interpretation rather than the other possible interpretation that this was part of the vow, a promise by Jacob to remain loyal to God — because that would imply: If God will do all the above, HASHEM will be a God to me, i.e., only then will I recognize Him as my God, but not otherwise ויחי. Such a blasphemous statement can clearly not be attributed to Jacob. Thus Rashi emphasizes that Jacob intended this as part of the condition: If God, Who is my God in any event, will allow His name to rest on me... (Gur Aryeh).

Rashbam, like Rashi, construes this as part of the condition: If HASHEM will be a God to me — by helping me in all my undertakings [the Name אלהים, God, referring to Him in His aspect of Dispenser of providential assistance to all His creatures.]

Kli Yakar in one opinion suggests that the intimation is: If it be in His manifestation of HASHEM [His aspect of Mercy] that He will be my

God [Dispenser of Justice]. That is, if He will deal with me in a manner of constantly tempering His justice with mercy.

Ramban, however, perceives this not as one of the conditions but as part of the vow, the implication being: If I return in peace to my father's house, then I will serve the One God in the Chosen Land at the site of this stone which will be as a House of God for me, and there will I set aside tithes.

Ramban continues that hidden in this is the esoteric rabbinic dictum [Kesubos 110b]: 'He who dwells outside Eretz Yisrael is like one who has no God' [the implication in our context being that only when Jacob returned to his father's house in Eretz Yisrael, would Hashem be his God in the fullest sense. See Overview to Lech Lecha, Gen. 12].

While noting that according to Ramban, Jacob's pledge should have begun a new verse, Haamek Davar explains why the promise is contingent upon his return to his father's home. In Charan — an alien and potentially hostile land — Jacob would surely place his trust in God, for what alternative could he have? But upon returning to Eretz Yisrael and the security of his father's home, it would be human nature to forget about his dependence on God. Therefore Jacob pledged, that his allegiance to God would continue even after his return home.

According to Sforno who also construes this as the vow, the implication is — if God shall do all the above then HASHEM shall be to me אלהים, my Judge, i.e., He shall judge me if I do not serve Him with all my might. That is, I accept upon myself that in such a case HASHEM, the Merciful One, should thenceforth deal with me in strict justice as Elohim.

will be a God to me — ²² then this stone which I have set up as a pillar shall become a house of God, and whatever You will give me, I shall repeatedly tithe to You.

22. וְהָאֵבֶן הַזֶּה — Then [lit. and] this stone ...

The translation of the conjunctive ו as *then* follows *Rashi*, according to whom this is the beginning of the vow; i.e., if He will do all the above for me *then* I, too, will do the following.

וְהָיָה בֵּית אֱלֹהִים — Shall become a house of God.

Rashi explains [that this is not to be taken literally as a vow to build a House of God (Mizrach); but] as *Onkelos* renders: *And at this stone ... will I worship before God* [i.e., this place will become a center for serving God (*Gur Aryeh*).] This is what Jacob later did when he returned from Paddan Aram: He returned to Bethel [35:1] and set up a pillar ... and poured a libation thereon.

Did this imply that if the conditions were not met Jacob would not serve God? — No; it implied that *this stone*, which symbolized the site of the promises, could have a special significance only upon fulfillment of the promises associated with it. If, however, Jacob were not to merit such blessings, then the stone would remain an unvenerated object (*Divrei David*).

Radak explains this as a promise to build an altar which would become an inspirational center for those who wish to worship God.

According to *Abarbanel*, this statement was a prophetic prognostication that on that site a House of God would be built by his descendants. Or, as *Radak* writes, that he would charge his children with the duty of building a Sanctuary when they would inherit the Land.

[Concerning the *Midrash* that God sunk that stone into the earth to become the *אֶבֶן שְׂתִיקָה*, *Foundation Stone* on which the Ark rested, see end of *Ramban* to v. 17.]

וְכָל אֲשֶׁר תְּתִילִי עֶשֶׂר אֲעֲשֶׂנוּ — And whatever You will give me, I shall repeatedly tithe [lit. tithe I shall tithe] to You.

This pledge includes a tenth of my children, whom I shall dedicate to Your service. Specifically, this was Levi, who, more than his brothers, was involved in serving God, and to whom Jacob imparted the esoteric teachings and wisdom of the Torah (*Radak* citing *Midrash*; see *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 37; *Tanchuma Re'eh* 14; *Targum Yonasan* 32:25).⁽¹⁾

1. A Cuthean asked R' Meir. 'Do you not maintain that Jacob was truthful? Certainly,' R' Meir replied.

'But did he not vow to give a tenth of everything God gave him?', the Cuthean asked. 'Yes, and he therefore even separated to God the tribe of Levi, which represented a tenth of the tribes,' R' Meir replied.

'Why did he not separate a tenth of the remaining two tribes?', the Cuthean insisted. 'Were there only twelve tribes?' R' Meir countered, 'there were fourteen, since Jacob considered Ephraim and Menasseh to be his own, 'like Reuben and Simeon' [48:5]... Now there were four Matriarchs, and the first-born of each must be deducted from the fourteen, since the first-born are holy and no tenth is needed to exempt what is already holy.'

'Happy are the people in whose midst you dwell!', the Cuthean exclaimed.

וַיִּצַא שְׁנֵי אֲעֻשָׁרָנוּ לָךְ: וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב רִגְלָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ כְּטֹא-בִּן אֶרְצָה בְּנֵי-קָדָם: וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה בָאֵר בַּשָּׂדֶה

[*Ibn Ezra* notes that this is the homiletical and not the literal sense of the passage. In the literal sense, the Torah does not require one to tithe his children. The intent was that he would tithe his material possessions.]

The translation of *אֲעֻשָׁרָנוּ* reflects the literal implication of the compound infinitive verbal form [lit. *tithe I will tithe*] which Scripturally denotes an emphatic significance: *I will surely tithe*, or as *Hirsch* renders, *I will repeatedly tithe*, the compound emphasizing the action. Cf. 2:16 *אָכַל תֹּאכַל*; 2:18 *יָדַע תֵּדַע*; 15:13 *מוֹת תָּמוּת*.

R' Nachman in *Kesubos* 50a interprets in this case the compound 'tithe I will tithe' as meaning that Jacob vowed to give a *double* tithe — that is, a fifth. This forms the basis for the ruling that even one who wishes to give liberally should not distribute more than a fifth of his wealth to charity. The purpose of this ruling was to prevent the donor from impoverishing himself and requiring assistance from others. The Talmudic sages are recorded as having, on various occasions, stopped others from giving away more than a fifth of their wealth.

Imrei Shefer refers this to the double tithe the Torah would later require — a tenth for the Levites and another tenth for the poor.

This was not a conditional vow but a separate statement: I will surely tithe regardless of what happens (*Devek Tov*).

Maharshal suggests that though Jacob would tithe from his gains whether or not the promises were fulfilled, the implication was that if

he were not to forfeit the blessings by sinning, he would give a *double* tithe (*אֲעֻשָׁרָנוּ*). Otherwise, he would still give the tithe required by law.

[That Jacob actually set aside the tithe he vowed is mentioned by *Rashi* in 32:33 and *Ibn Ezra* in 35:14.]

לָךְ — To You.

— I.e., I will give my tithes to a person worthy of receiving them for the glory of God (*Ibn Ezra*).

According to *Rashbam*: By offering sacrifices to You.

Jacob did not yet have riches; how could he pledge the transfer of *כֶּכֶר* *שֶׁלֹא בָא לְעוֹלָם*, something that had not yet come into existence? Even in a commercial transaction, such an obligation would be invalid unless, according to some opinions, it was upheld by an oath. [See *comm.* to 25:33.]

Rambam in *Hilchos Arachin* 6:32 maintains that were one to say: 'I pledge myself to donate [to charity] all that I earn this year,' or something similar, he is bound, because of his vow, to consecrate it after that which he pledged has come into existence. He draws evidence for this ruling from our case of Jacob which in 31:13 God acknowledges as having been a valid vow. *Rambam* goes on to explain that these and similar utterances belong to the class of *נִדְרִים*, *vows*, and not to the class of *הִקְדָּשׁוֹת*, *consecrations*. The difference between the two categories is this: A *vow* is a pledge to do something; a person can so obligate himself. However, *consecration* means that someone wishes to place a condition of sanctity on an object and to transfer it to sacred ownership. This, like all transfers of property, can be done only when something is in existence.

XXIX

1. Jacob meets Rachel

וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב רַגְלָיו — So [lit. and] Jacob lifted [or lit. carried] his feet.

I.e., he lifted his feet with agility and proceeded on his journey (Targum Yonasan).

At the good tidings which he had received assuring him of God's protection, his heart 'lifted his feet' and he felt very light as he continued his journey (Rashi citing Midrash).

This is an idiomatic expression for traveling joyfully and briskly (Rashbam).

[Sforno perceives the connotation to be that having perceived such Divine closeness and received God's assurances of protection, Jacob proceeded on his journey confident and without reluctance. He writes:]

When we mean to imply that a person goes willingly, we may rightly say that he 'carries his feet.' But if a person goes reluctantly, we say rather that 'his feet carry him.' Cf. Isaiah 47:9: Pass over to

Tarshish; how you inhabitants of the coastland. Is this your joyous city whose feet in antiquity, in ancient days, carried her afar to sojourn?

וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶרְצָה בְּנֵי קָנָן — And went toward the land of the Easterners [lit. children of the east].

The reference is to Abraham's ancestral home — the regions east of Eretz Yisrael: Aram, Ur Kasdim, etc. See comm. to 25:6.

וַיִּרְא — [And] he looked [lit. saw].

וַיִּהְיֶה בְּאֵר בְּשָׂדֶה — And behold, a well in the field!

The Torah narrates this incident at length to illustrate how those who wait [confidently] for God shall renew their strength [Isaiah 40:31]. For though Jacob was weary from his long journey, he was able to roll away the stone unassisted, a task which usually required the combined effort of all the shepherds (Ramban).^[1]

1. The symbolism of this incident.

Ramban again expounds on the principle that whatever happened to the Patriarchs foreshadowed events in the future of their descendants. This is the reason why the Torah relates at length seemingly unimportant incidents in their lives. [See footnote on page 436, and Overview to Lech-Lecha (Vol. II page 383).]

Citing the Midrash, he explains that the well symbolized the Temple, the three flocks of sheep are symbolic of the pilgrims ascending to the Temple during the three pilgrimage festivals [=Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot; see Deut. 16:16]; from that well they would water the flocks represented the spiritual influence emanating from the Temple. Or, it may be that the water symbolized the Torah, which has been likened to water [Isaiah 55:1, Bava Kamma 17a], emanating from Zion along with God's Word [Isaiah 2:3]. Having enjoyed the water, they replaced the stone, until the next festival.

Other allegorical interpretations recorded in the Midrash are:

The well in the field represented the Sanhedrin [source of spiritual sustenance to Israel]; the three flocks of sheep symbolize the three rows of scholars who sat in front of the Sanhedrin during their deliberations; from that well they watered the flocks: it was there the halachah

והנה שם שלשה עדר־צאן רבצים
עליה בי מן הבאר ההוא ישקו העדרים
והאבן גדלה על־פי הבאר: ונאספו־
שמה כל־העדרים וגללו את־האבן מעל־
פי הבאר והשקו את־הצאן והשיבו את־
האבן על־פי הבאר למקמה: ויאמר

והנה שם שלשה עדר־צאן רבצים עליה
— And behold! Three flocks of
sheep lay there beside [lit. upon] it.

The translation of עָלָיו, [upon it] as 'beside it' follows Radak who cites such similar idiomatic usage in Numbers 2:20: וְעָלָיו מִשֵּׁה מְנַשֶּׁה. and beside him shall be the tribe of Menasseh.

The connotation of עָלָיו, upon it in contexts such as our verse is: dependent upon it, i.e., the sheep lay there dependent upon the water of that well (R' David Feinstein).

יִשְׁקוּ הָעֲדָרִים — They would water the flocks.

[The future tense יִשְׁקוּ, lit. will water, is in the imperfect tense and expresses a continual action]: They, i.e., the shepherds, used to water the flocks; this verse uses an elliptical phrase they would water [omitting

the implied subject: the shepherds] (Rashi; see next verse).

והאבן גדלה על־פי הבאר — Now [lit. and] the stone over the mouth of the well was large.

Had the Torah merely wanted to tell us that the stone was large rather than small, the expression would have been על פי האבן גדלה, and [there was] a large stone over the mouth of the well. Reading as it does והאבן גדלה, and the stone ... was a large one, the syntax emphasizes the very large size of the stone. The intent is to accent Jacob's God-given strength in effortlessly rolling off the stone as described in v. 10 (Or HaChaim).

[Apparently, many wells in that region were regularly kept covered with boulders — as is still the case today. The syntax indicates that the

was expounded by the Sanhedrin; the stone over the well was large: the Court's leading scholar, who defined the Law; all the flocks would be assembled there: the other scholars of Eretz Yisrael; they would roll the stone: they, too, would hear the Law expounded in the Sanhedrin; then they would return the stone upon the mouth of the well in its place: they would discuss each rule until it was thoroughly clarified.

[Other interpretations too lengthy to include here interpret the well as symbolizing the well which accompanied the Israelites in the desert; the three flocks allude to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, etc. Another Midrash allegorizes the well as alluding to Mount Sinai; and the three flocks as alluding to the priests, Levites, and ordinary Israelites who heard the Commandments given there.]

Kli Yakar cautions that none of these Midrashic interpretations mean to negate the literal sense of the verse (אין המקרא יוצא מירי פשוט). Rather, the Sages perceive that Jacob's encounter with the shepherds could not have been mere coincidence. Recognizing that God was showing Jacob what the future would hold for his children, the Sages seek to interpret the symbolism of the incident.

the field! And behold! Three flocks of sheep lay there beside it, for from that well they would water the flocks. Now the stone over the mouth of the well was large. ³ When all the flocks would be assembled there they would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep. Then they would put back the stone over the mouth of the well, in its place.

Torah stresses *not* that a stone was used to protect the well — that was quite common, but that the stone was large, גְּדוֹלָה, *so large*, that it could be moved only by the collective effort of all the shepherds.]

The commentators offer the reasons for use of such a large boulder:

— Because this was the town's only source of water, they wanted to ensure that no water was drawn until *all* the flocks were assembled; this would prevent wastage of water in the troughs which would occur if each flock were watered individually (Radak).

— As a safety measure to prevent creatures and objects from falling into the well, and to prevent unauthorized persons from drawing its water (Chizkuni).

R' Hirsch observes, however, that generally the cover of a public well is made to be removed easily to facilitate its use. That this well was made so inaccessible gives us an insight into the base character of the Arameans — no one trusted the other, nor would allow another to gain even the slightest advantage. Fearing that someone might take more than his share of water, they made the cover so heavy that only by their combined effort could the well be used.

From this description of the extreme precautions employed to

guard the well, the Sages infer that the region was short of water and the residents were compelled to water all their sheep from that one well. Yet, after Jacob arrived, the fountains were blessed and water was in abundance as is evident from the mention of watering-troughs [plural] in 30:38 (Midrash HaGadol; see Targum Yonasan cited to 27:10).

3. וְנֶאֱסַפוּ שָׁמָּה כָּל הָעֶדְרִים. — When [lit. and] all the flocks would be assembled there.

As Rashi explains, they regularly assembled there because the boulder was so heavy.

וְגָלְלוּ אֶת הָאֶבֶן — They [i.e., the shepherds (Radak)] would roll the stone.

Though the verb is in past-conversive, it has a frequentive sense: they used to roll, and it is so rendered by Onkelos: וְמִנְדְּרִין. Frequent action is conveyed by the [imperfect] future or [perfect] past tenses, because every continuous action has already happened and will happen again (Rashi).

וְהָשִׁיבוּ אֶת הָאֶבֶן — Then [lit. and] they would put back the stone.

Again, the verb is rendered in the 'frequentive' tense: they used to return the stone, as indicated by Onkelos' use of the participle: וּמְחִיבִין (Rashi).

וַיֹּצֵא בֶטְהוּלָהּ
 הַמִּחְרָן אֶנְחֹר: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הַיִּדְעֶתֶם אֶת-
 י לָבָן בֶּן-נָחֹר וַיֹּאמְרוּ יָדַעְנוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם
 הַשְּׁלֹם לָּו וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁלֹם וְהִנֵּה רָחֵל
 ז בְּתוּ בָאָה עִם-הָצֹאן: וַיֹּאמֶר הֵן עוֹד
 הַיּוֹם גְּדוֹל לֹא-עַתָּה הָאֶסֶף הַמִּקְנֶה הַשֶּׁקֶו

4. [And] Jacob said to them.

I.e., to the shepherds already assembled there (Rabag).

אָחִי — My brothers.

A congenial form of address given even to non-relatives and strangers to initiate a feeling of friendliness and peaceful intentions; compare Lot's remark in 19:8 (Radak).⁽¹⁾

5. Laban the son of Nachor.

Actually Laban's father was Bethuel; he was Nachor's grandson [see 22:20 ff. and 24:29]...

R' Bachya suggests that the use of son instead of grandson is common since, as the Sages note [Yevamos 62b]: 'Grandchildren are considered as children.' See 20:12

where this interpretation is cited in the case of Abraham who referred to Sarah as my father's daughter when, in reality, she was his father's granddaughter.

Ramban, taking son in the sense of 'descendant,' offers three reasons for identifying Laban with his grandfather: (a) Laban was better known through his grandfather, Nachor, than through his father, Bethuel, since Nachor was an important personage and the head of the family as evidenced by 31:53: God of Abraham and god of Nachor; (b) possibly Laban preferred to be identified with Nachor because Bethuel was a dishonorable person. This would explain why Laban answered before his father [24:50]; or (c) perhaps it was to demonstrate their connection with

1. The Midrash perceives in this passage an allusion to the later dispersion of Israel when Jacob would address his descendants, so to speak:

My brothers — i.e., conduct yourselves as brothers; from where are you from? — Why are you dispersed and scattered?

... We are from Charan — we are fleeing from God's wrath [Charon].

Do you know Laban? — Do you recognize your sins and do you know that only He can make your sins whiter [lavan] than snow (cf. Isaiah 1:18)?

We know — and confess our sins.

The Peace is His! — He is the personification of Peace ... may He grant you peace and settle you in the habitation of peace.

Peace — through whose merit shall it come about?

See! ... Rachel is coming with the flock — peace shall come by her merit as it says [Jeremiah 31:15-17]: Rachel is weeping for her children ... Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from shedding tears; for there is reward for your labor and they shall return from the enemy's land. And there is hope for your future, says HASHEM, and your children shall return to their own border (Midrash HaGadol).

⁴ Jacob said to them, 'My brothers, where are you from?' And they said, 'We are from Charan'. ⁵ He said to them, 'Do you know Laban the son of Nachor?' And they said, 'We know.' ⁶ Then he said, 'Is it well with him?' They answered, 'It is well. And see — his daughter Rachel is coming with the flock!'

⁷ He said, 'Look it is still broad daylight; it is not yet time to bring the livestock in. Water the sheep

their illustrious relative Abraham that his family preferred to trace its lineage to *Nachor brother of Abraham* [see 22:23].

6. הַשְׁלוֹם לוֹ — Is it well with him? [lit. is there peace to him?].

I.e., in what circumstances does he find himself? Jacob's sensitivity prompted him to ask this question. He was about to visit Laban and he wanted to know how to approach him according to his circumstances (*Sforno*).

וְהִנֵּה רָחֵל בָּתוּ בָּאָה עִם הַצֹּאֵן — And see — his daughter Rachel is coming with the flock!

The shepherds' answers, as the *Midrash* observes, were curt and to the point.

They realized that Jacob's curiosity about Laban would involve more details about his personal life than they could supply. They therefore pointed out his daughter, as if to say: Look, his daughter is coming — perhaps you should ask her your questions directly! (*Haamek Davar*).

Compare the *Midrash*: Jacob said to them הַשְׁלוֹם לוֹ, is there peace between you and him? And they said: There is peace. And if you are anxious for gossip: See, there is his daughter Rachel coming with the sheep — for women are fond of gossiping.

[On Rachel's role as shepherdess, see v. 9.]

The word בָּאָה in our verse is accented on the second syllable בָּ, indicating that it is present tense: [she] is coming, as *Onkelos* renders אָתָּה; while in verse 9 the accent is on the first syllable בָּ, indicating that it is past tense: she arrived, as *Onkelos* renders: אָתָּה (*Rashi*).

[Cf. *Rashi* to בָּאָה in 16:17 and שָׁבָה in *Ruth* 1:15.]

7. הֵן עוֹד הַיּוֹם גָּדוֹל — Look, it is still broad daylight [lit. the day is yet great.]

Seeing the assembled flocks lying around, Jacob assumed that the shepherds had gathered the sheep to bring them home without intending to let them graze any longer. He therefore reminded them that עוֹד הַיּוֹם גָּדוֹל, it was still early, and if they were being paid by the day they had not yet completed a day's work. On the other hand even if you own the sheep: לֹא עַתָּה הָאֵסֶף, it is not yet time to bring in the livestock. Therefore, [take advantage of the additional hours of grazing]: הַשְׁקוּ הַצֹּאֵן וּלְכוּ רְעוּ, water the sheep and go on grazing them (*Rashi* based on *Midrash*).

— He called the livestock מִקְנֵהוּ, property, [from קָנָה, own], thereby reminding them of their duty towards the owner of the sheep. They should not be allowed to lie about idle, but should be taken to the pastures (*R' Hirsch*).

ח הצאן ולכו רעו: ויאמרו לא נוכל ער
אשר יאספו בל-העדרים וגללו את-
האבן מעל פי הבאר והשקינו הצאן:
ט עודנו מדבר עמם ורחל| בָּאָה עִם־הַצֹּאֵן
י אשר לאביה כי רעה הוא: ויהי כאשר
ראה יעקב את-רחל בת-לכן אחי אמו

Jacob's attitude illustrates how a righteous man objects to a wrong being done even to strangers, as it is said [Proverbs 29:27]: *An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous (Sforno)*.

Water the sheep and go on grazing [i.e. until night falls.]

According to *Haamek Davar*, Jacob wished to converse with Rachel privately, so he suggested that the shepherds leave.

8. לא נוכל — *We will be unable to.*

I.e., *we cannot* water the flocks because the boulder is heavy [and we are not strong enough to move it ourselves] (*Rashi*).

That is, do not assume that we are shirking our responsibilities; we did not conspire to congregate idly by the well rather than graze our flocks. We have no choice: it is physically impossible for us to water our flocks, since the weight of the boulder forces us to wait for the others to come and help us roll the stone from atop the well (*Mizrachi*; *Tzeidah laDerech*).

And they [i.e. the shepherds] will roll the stone off [lit. from upon] the mouth of the well.

[See *comm.* end of v. 2.]

In another grammatical note *Rashi* observes that [in contrast to v. 3 where וגללו is rendered in the frequentive sense] here it is

rendered by *Onkelos* in the future tense ויגללו, *they will roll*.

9. עודנו מדבר עמם — [While] he was still speaking with them.

This phrase implies that Rachel arrived while he [Jacob] was still speaking, but the context of the verses indicates that she came during the shepherds' reply of verse 8. If so, our verse should read עודם מדברים עמו, *While 'they' were still speaking with 'him'*. It may be that Jacob is kept as the subject of the verse because he is the main character of the entire series of chapters. Or it may be that Rachel arrived as Jacob was addressing his remonstrance to the shepherds [v. 7], but, out of respect to Jacob, Scripture gives their answer to him before reverting to the arrival of Rachel (*Or HaChaim*).

— ורחל באה עם הצאן אשר לאביה — [And] Rachel had arrived with her father's sheep.

The implication is that she came leading all his sheep; obviously Laban's flock was small since Rachel alone was able to lead them all. This would corroborate Jacob's later remark to Laban [30:30]: *For the little which you had before [my arrival] has now increased into a great multitude*. That such a young maiden could lead a flock of even such a size also displays Rachel's

29 and go on grazing.' ⁸ But they said, 'We will be unable to, until all the flocks will have been gathered and they will roll the stone off the mouth of the well. We will then water the sheep.'

⁹ While he was still speaking with them Rachel had arrived with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. ¹⁰ And it was, when Jacob saw Rachel, daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the

skill as a shepherdess [see *Targum Yonasan* below] (*Alshich; Or HaChaim*).

The *Midrash* draws a comparison between the region of Midian where Jethro's seven daughters who came to water their flocks were driven away by the other shepherds [*Exodus* 2:17], and the district of Charan where Rachel coming alone was unmolested even though she was beautiful [v. 17]. This is indicative of the influence which the righteous Abraham's residence in that region (almost a century earlier) had still exerted in their spiritual life (following *Matnos Kehunah*). (Cf. *Ramban* below.)

The accent here is on the first syllable *בָּאָה*, indicating past tense. See *Rashi* to v. 6.

הוּא — כי רְעָה הוּא — For she was a shepherdess.

She alone tended the flocks as there was no other shepherd. Leah did not share this chore, either because the sun might have been harmful to her weak eyes [see v. 17], or because she was older — of marriageable age — and Laban was afraid to let her mix with the shepherds. It could be that Laban — being of Abraham's family — was more modest than Jethro and would not allow his more mature daughter to venture among the shepherds. In the case of Rachel, however, there was no apprehension since she was still too young for the shepherd boys to take an interest in her (*Ramban*).

The Torah adds the description of Rachel as a shepherdess to intimate that Rachel tended her father's sheep only because she was a skilled shepherdess and was eminently qualified for this task. Otherwise, Rachel would not have undertaken such a chore since she was not a *נִצְאָנִית*, a type who liked to appear in public. Therefore the Torah uses the verb *בָּאָה*, came, [rather than the uncomplimentary *וַתֵּצֵא*, she went out, from which it might be inferred that she enjoyed going out and was lacking in modesty. For such connotations of the word *וַתֵּצֵא*, see *Rashi*; 34:1] (*Or HaChaim*).

According to *Kli Chemdah*, since Laban was a notorious swindler no one would work for him. Therefore, he thrust the responsibility on his younger daughter.

Targum Yonasan records that there had been a divine plague which wiped out Laban's flocks except for these few sheep. He therefore dismissed his shepherds and entrusted the remaining sheep to Rachel who was a shepherdess at that time.

10. בָּאֲשֶׁר רָאָה וַעֲקֵב אֶת רָחֵל — When Jacob saw Rachel ...

... But he did not roll it off sooner. He was apprehensive that if he did, the shepherds would water

וַיֵּצֵא וַיִּגְדֹּל וַיִּשָּׂא
 אֶת־הָאֶבֶן מֵעַל־פִּי הַבְּאֵר וַיִּשֶׁק אֶת־צֵאן
 יֵא לָבָן אָחִי אִמּוֹ: וַיִּשָּׁק יַעֲקֹב לְרַחֵל וַיִּשָּׂא
 יב אֶת־קִלּוֹ וַיִּבֶן: וַיִּגְדֹּל יַעֲקֹב לְרַחֵל כִּי אָחִי

only their own three flocks and would not wait to assist the others (*Sforno*).

[One can only imagine Jacob's exhilaration over 'happening' to meet — at that very moment — the daughter of the uncle to whom he was traveling in search of a wife and in flight from Esau. Jacob surely perceived this as an act of Providence guiding him to his destined wife. He must have compared his experience to that of Eliezer who 'happened' upon Rebecca when he was searching for a wife for Isaac nearly one hundred years earlier.]

בֶּת־לָבָן אָחִי אִמּוֹ וָאֵת צֵאן לָבָן אָחִי אִמּוֹ
 — Daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother.

That Laban was his mother's brother is repeated three times in this verse to emphasize clearly that Jacob's every action was prompted not by the mere sight of Rachel but by his love for his mother (*R' Bachya; Abarbanel*).

As *R' Hirsch* explains: Jacob's every act was motivated by devotion to his mother whom he saw before him in the person of her relative. The frequent stress on this relationship provides an understanding of Jacob's reason for kissing Rachel. Otherwise, it would have been taken as an act of gallantry toward a pretty shepherdess. [See next verse.]

... וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב וַיִּגְדֹּל — [And] Jacob came forward [lit. approached;

drew near] and rolled the stone off [lit. from upon] the mouth of the well.

— Unaided (*Rashbam*).

— As effortlessly as one draws a stopper from the mouth of a bottle. This illustrates Jacob's great physical strength (*Rashi*. [See *Ramban* to v. 2.]).

According to *Tzror HaMor*, it was the sight of Rachel, his mother's niece, under these circumstances that stirred him to perform this feat of great physical prowess. [*Malbim* comments similarly.]

Mizrachi offers that *Rashi's* Midrashic interpretation comparing Jacob's feat to the drawing of a stopper from the mouth of a bottle is based on the use of וַיִּגְדֹּל literally, he revealed, instead of וַיִּרְלֹךְ, he rolled. He suggests that וַיִּגְדֹּל comes from the root גִּלל uncover rather than גָּלל roll, and the verb is suggestive of the ease with which Jacob plucked off the stone and uncovered the well.

However, the word וַיִּגְדֹּל is generally interpreted by the commentators [*Onkelos, Ibn Janach, Radak*] as rolled.

Accordingly, *Sifsei Chachamim* suggests that *Rashi* derives his interpretation from the proximity of the two verbs: וַיִּגְדֹּל, he drew near and rolled, implying that no sooner had he drawn near than he rolled the stone away, as if no effort were required.

HaKsav V'HaKabalah cites an interpretation that this exegesis is based on the non-emphatic form וַיִּגְדֹּל instead of וַיִּגְדֹּל which, by virtue of the intensive form would have suggested a strenuous rolling rather than the effortless one implied here.

R' Hirsch notes that the word וַיִּגְדֹּל is in *hiph'il* [=causative]: he [effortlessly] let it roll away. This root occurs nowhere else in the *hiph'il*. It designates

29 sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came
11-12 forward and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of Laban his mother's brother. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel; and he raised his voice and wept. ¹² Jacob told Rachel that he was

the ease with which he pushed the great stone aside.

וַיִּשָּׂק אֶת צֹאן לָבָן אָחִי אִמּוֹ — And watered the sheep of Laban his mother's brother.

The Midrash notes that unlike the case of Moses where it specifically says that he *drew* the water [Exodus 2:19], here in the case of Jacob, when he rolled the stone off the mouth of the well, the water in the well rose up and flowed over the sides to water Laban's sheep. This is the intent of the omission of any mention of his having drawn water from the well. The shepherds who witnessed this were astonished at his strength when they had difficulty in removing the stone collectively. Jacob viewed the overflowing water as a heavenly sign that he was now meeting his pre-destined wife (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*; *Pirkei d'Rabbeinu HaKadosh*; *Zohar* 2:151).

According to *Targum Yonasan*, in Jacob's merit the water continued overflowing for twenty years [i.e., the total duration of Jacob's stay in Charan].

11. וַיִּשָּׂק יַעֲקֹב לְרָחֵל — Then [lit. and] Jacob kissed Rachel.

Rachel was still too young to arouse one's passion, and Jacob's kiss should be perceived in that context. Or, as *Ibn Ezra* [to 27:27]

interprets, when the verb נִשָּׂק, *kiss*, is followed by the prefix ל [as in our verse: וַיִּשָּׂק יַעֲקֹב לְרָחֵל] it means that he kissed her *not* on the mouth, but on the head or on the shoulder [or on the cheek as was the customary greeting of the region (see *Ibn Ezra* to *Song of Songs* 1:2)] (*Ramban* to v. 9).

As may be inferred from *Rashi* below in v. 13 however, this opinion is not universal, and according to most commentators, the verb *kiss* in Scripture regardless of what follows it, denotes a kiss on the mouth.

[Notwithstanding the above, the *halachah*, (*Even HaEzer* ch. 21) forbids such intimacy even with members of one's family unless they are very young children, except between parent and child.]

וַיִּבֶךְ — And [he] wept.

— Because he foresaw through the prophetic spirit that she would not be buried with him [in the Cave of Machpelah.] [He also perceived that she would be buried along the highway and would lament as her descendants passed her grave on their way into exile. At the thought of their long exile, he wept (*Yafeh Toar*).] Another reason he wept was because he came empty-handed. He thought: *Eliezer*, who was only my grandfather's *servant* came for my mother laden with riches, while I come here destitute. *Esau's* son

וַיֵּצֵא אֲבִיהָ הוּא וְכִי בֶן־רִבְקָה הוּא וַתֵּרָץ
כַּסְיָא יֵי וַתִּגְדַּל לְאִבִּיהָ: וַיְהִי כְשִׁמְעַע לְבָן אֶת־שִׁמְעַן

Eliphaz took everything I had (Rashi citing Midrash).¹¹

According to *Sforno* Jacob wept at the thought of his not having merited to have married her in his youth and to already have had children born to him as a young man.

Following *R' Hirsch*: Jacob's tears show the motive for his kiss. He did not see her beauty; he saw a relative after a long and lonely journey. [See above (28:10) that Jacob had studied at the Academy of Eber for fourteen years after leaving his parents' house.] The sight of his mother's niece moved him to tears and to a show of affection. Because Rachel must have been mystified, he withdrew and, in the next verse, explained the cause of his emotion.¹²

Haamek Davar similarly explains the tears after the kiss. He adds, however, that regarding Jacob's destitution, it would seem, according to the literal sense, that Jacob's riches would have dwindled away during his fourteen years at the Academy of Eber.

12. ... וַיִּגְדַּל לְאִבִּיהָ — [And]

1. The *Midrash* records that when Jacob fled, Esau ordered his son Eliphaz to pursue Jacob and kill him. Eliphaz obeyed and overtook Jacob.

Since Eliphaz had been brought up on Isaac's lap, however, he refrained from slaying Jacob, but at the same time he realized that he would have to answer to his father for not obeying his command.

'I do not want to kill you, but what shall I do regarding my father's order?' Eliphaz asked. 'Take everything that I have', Jacob suggested, 'and leave me destitute. Then you will have obeyed your father's orders since a poor man is considered as dead' (*Rashi*).

2. There is a view in the *Midrash* that Jacob wept in response to the reaction of the onlookers who started whispering to one another, accusing him of introducing immorality there by kissing a girl in public. His weeping was to emphasize that his kiss was not a frivolous one, but that of a kinsman. The *Midrash* derives from this episode that one must reckon with what people may think as well as with what is right before Heaven (*Mishnas Rabbi Eliezer 7*; cf. *Midrash Rabbah*).

We find, accordingly, that one who is the victim of unwarranted accusation should weep. The *Talmud* [*Yoma 19b*] relates that the High Priest who was admonished against performing the rites like a Sadducee would separate himself and weep at the fact that he was under suspicion. Similarly Joseph wept [45:2] because, as the *Pesikta* explains, his brothers suspected him of planning to seek vengeance for their having sold him into slavery (*Yalkut Yehudah*).

Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's relative.

[Our translation interprets the order of events as having occurred as indicated by the verses: first, he kissed her (v. 11), then he identified himself (v. 12).]

Ibn Ezra renders in past-perfect: *had* told. Only after telling her of their relationship (v. 12) did he kiss her (v. 11). [*Ralbag* and *Abarbanel* render similarly.]

According to *Sforno*, however, the sequence of events is as related in the narrative. He told her that he was her relative to assure her that he had not acted improperly by kissing her. [*Chizkuni* renders similarly; see also *R' Hirsch* above.]

[In 24:23 the verb *תִּגְדַּל*, *tell*, denotes the transmission of a comprehensive fully detailed conversation, in contrast with *אָמַר*, *say*, which has a more superficial connotation.]

— כִּי אָחִי אֲבִיהָ הוּא וְכִי בֶן־רִבְקָה הוּא
That he was her father's relative, and that he was Rebecca's son.

The translation of אָחִי [lit.

29 her father's relative, and that he was Rebecca's son.
12 Then she ran and told her father.

brother] as *relative* follows Rashi who cites a similar usage in 13:8: for we are kinsmen [אֲחָיִים, lit. brothers.] Rashi then goes on to explain the apparently redundant description of himself as both her father's brother and Rebecca's son, when one would have sufficed, by citing the *Midrashic* interpretation:

— Should your father wish to deceive me then *I am his brother* in deceit, [i.e. I am a match for him.] If, however, he is an honorable man, then I, too, am a son of his honorable sister Rebecca [and I will reciprocate accordingly.][1]

In answer to how a righteous man like Jacob could threaten to reciprocate Laban's deceit, *Or HaChaim* suggests that the intimation of the above *Midrash* is: 'If Laban acts treacherously with me, I will outwit him in an honest, legal manner. By behaving with integrity and according to the law, I will prevent him from cheating me.' Jacob alluded to this intention by describing himself as Rebecca's son; he had no intention of disgracing her righteous reputation. This is the inner meaning of the verse, *wisdom will give life to its possessor* (Koheles 7:12).

The *Talmud* [Bava Basra 123a; see footnote] records in this connection that when Rachel asked him if a righteous man may resort to deceit, he cited the verse 'with the

righteous act righteously, and with the crooked act crookedly, [II Samuel 22:2].

According to Sforino, as noted, he mentioned that he was her father's relative to allay any apprehension over his having kissed her. He added mention of Rebecca although Rachel did not know her, so that she might thus inform her father.

He mentioned his relationship to her father to intimate their physical kinship; the mention of his well-known righteous mother served to establish the spiritual kinship since the righteous rejoice in a kindred soul (*Or HaChaim*).

וְתַרְץ וְתַגֵּד לְאָבִיהָ — Then she ran and told her father.

— Because her mother was dead and she had no one else to tell but him (*Rashi* following *Midrash*).

[See *comm.* to 24:28 that Rebecca, in contrast, ran to her mother's tent because, as *Rashi* notes there, a girl tends to confide only in her mother. The *Midrash* there notes that Rachel's mother had died and she had no one else to confide in but her father.]

Ramban suggests however, that according to the plain meaning of the verses, Rachel went to her father so that he should go and welcome his relative. Her mother was not Jacob's relative; what would she do for him? On the other hand, Rebecca ran to her mother first, specifically to show her the jewels Eliezer had given her [24:28] as girls customarily do.

1. According to *Bava Basra* 123a it was on this occasion that Jacob asked Rachel's hand in marriage. She consented, but warned him that she had an older sister and that her cunning father would not allow her to be married before her sister. Jacob reassured her that he was her father's 'brother' in cunning, and he entrusted her with certain identifying passwords [by which he would identify her in the dark.] These were the signs Rachel later compassionately entrusted to Leah on her marriage night in order to prevent her humiliation if Laban's ruse were to be discovered. [See *Megillah* 13b, and *comm.* to v. 25.]

יַעֲקֹב בֶּן-אָחִיתוֹ וַיֵּרָץ לִקְרֹאתוֹ וַיַּחֲבֹק-לוֹ
וַיִּנָּשֶׁק-לוֹ וַיְבִיאוּהוּ אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ וַיִּסְפֹּר לְלֶכֶן
יְיָ אֵת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה: וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֶכֶן
אֲךָ עַצְמִי וּבִשְׂרִי אָתָּה וַיֵּשֶׁב עִמּוֹ חֹדֶשׁ

וַיֵּצֵא
כַּסִּיד

13. אַח שָׁמַע יַעֲקֹב בֶּן-אָחִיתוֹ. — *The news of Jacob his nephew* [lit. sister's son].

— I.e., the news that Jacob had rolled away the stone (*Sforno*).

— The account of Jacob's strength and piety; how he had procured the birthright and blessings from his brother; how HASHEM had revealed Himself to him at Bethel; how he had removed the boulder and how the well had overflowed ... (*Targum Yonasan*).

וַיֵּרָץ לִקְרֹאתוֹ. — [And] he ran toward him.

Laban thought that Jacob must be loaded with money seeing that a mere household servant [Eliezer] had [years earlier] come with ten richly laden camels [24:10] (*Rashi*).

[This comment, like the comment on Laban's hurry to greet Eliezer in 24:29 is based on the sinister manner which Laban emerges in traditional Rabbinic perspective. It was known that Laban was not righteous, and that he was not simply being hospitable; his effusive welcome is accordingly interpreted as motivated by the sort of avarice he displayed in his later treatment of Jacob.]

As R' Höffmann comments: We already know Laban [see 24:29] as a self-centered, greedy person. It was

only the glitter of jewels on his sister's arm that had prompted him [97 years earlier!] to run and invite the stranger — Eliezer — into his home. Now, too, his attention was focused on the possible wealth he hoped Jacob had brought with him. But as he was soon to learn to his great disappointment, his nephew had come to him empty-handed!

וַיַּחֲבֹק-לוֹ. — [And] he embraced him.

Seeing that Jacob was empty-handed, Laban thought that he might have the money hidden on his person. He therefore embraced him [to frisk him and discover any hidden treasures] (*Rashi* based on *Midrash*).

This inference is drawn from a knowledge of Laban's personality and from the fact that the Torah should normally have expressed these actions more economically as וַיִּחְבְּקֵהוּ וַיִּנָּשֶׁקֵהוּ. The use of the word לוֹ, which can be translated for himself prompted the Rabbis to interpret our phrase to imply that Laban embraced Jacob לוֹ, for his [Laban's] own benefit; in search of riches (*Maskil l'David*).¹¹

וַיִּנָּשֶׁק-לוֹ. — [And he] kissed him.

When Laban felt nothing on Jacob's person, he kissed him thinking that his wealth might consist of

1. [Maskil l'David's inquiry into Rashi's justification for this interpretation points up a fundamental principle of Rashi's commentary throughout Scripture. Since Rashi to our verse quotes *Midrash Rabbah*, one might wonder why, instead of seeking a textual basis for Rashi's interpretation, Maskil l'David did not say simply that Rashi relied on the *Midrash*. Such an approach, however, would not be consonant with Rashi's own intention.

Above [on 3:8], Rashi explained his guiding principle in the choice of *Midrashic* interpretation: יֵשׁ מִרְשֵׁי אֲנֵדָה רַבִּים וּבְכָר סִידְרוֹם כְּבוֹדֵהֵינוּ עַל מְכֻנָּם בְּרָאשִׁית רַבָּה וּבִשְׂאֵר מִדְּרָשׁוֹת. וְאֵי לֹא: יֵשׁ מִרְשֵׁי אֲנֵדָה רַבִּים וּבְכָר סִידְרוֹם כְּבוֹדֵהֵינוּ עַל מְכֻנָּם בְּרָאשִׁית רַבָּה וּבִשְׂאֵר מִדְּרָשׁוֹת. There are many homiletic expositions and our Rabbis have arranged them in an orderly manner in Bereishis

13-14 ¹³ And it was, when Laban heard the news of Jacob his nephew, he ran toward him, embraced him, kissed him, and took him to his house. He recounted to Laban all these events. ¹⁴ Then Laban said to him, 'Nevertheless, you are my flesh and blood!' And he stayed with him a month's time.

precious stones carried in his mouth (Rashi).

This long, searching kiss is intimated by the intensive *pi'el*, נִיָּשַׁק, instead of the more simple, *kal* form נִשַּׁק used above in v. 11 (Heidenheim; Hoffmann).

[See *Ibn Ezra* cited to v.11 who maintains that the prefix indicates that the kiss was not on the mouth. *Rashi* here, however, certainly echoes the Rabbinic interpretation that Laban kissed Jacob on the mouth.]

וַיְסַפֵּר לָלָבָן אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה — [And] he [i.e., Jacob] recounted to Laban all these events.

What did Jacob recount?

He explained that he had come only because he was being persecuted by his brother, and that he had come penniless because all his money had been taken from him by Eliphaz (Rashi).

He explained that his parents had sent him to his family (Rashbam).

He related how it came about that he had received his father's blessings (Ibn Ezra).

Rabbah and the other Midrashic works. However, I have come only to explain the plain meaning of Scripture and to cite such Midrashim as explain each word of Scripture within its proper context.

Accordingly, Rashi selected only such Midrashic expositions as are necessary to clarify the simple meaning of the verse. For this reason, the commentators to Rashi will often seek to find the textual consideration which compelled him to cite a particular Midrash.]

1. The Vilna Gaon cites the Talmudic dictum [Niddah 31a] that there are three partners in man: God, his father and his mother ... The father supplies the substance out of which are formed the child's bones ... while his mother supplies the substance out of which is formed his flesh ...

Accordingly, the Gaon explains the connotation of Laban's remark to be: You are related to me both from your father's side [=the bone, through Nachor/Abraham] and from your mother's side [=the flesh, through Rebecca].

14. Laban invites Jacob to reside with him

אָךְ עֲצָמִי וּבָשָׁרִי אֵתָה — Nevertheless you are my flesh and blood! [The translation conveys the English idiom. The Hebrew is literally: my bone and flesh].^[1]

[The connotation of אָךְ which implies a converse to that which precedes it is:] Because you come penniless I am under no obligation to show you hospitality. Nevertheless, [i.e., although you are poor] you are my relative, and I will therefore put up with you for one month's time. And thus he did. But even that month was not free: Jacob earned his keep by tending Laban's flocks [as implied by the next verse] (Rashi).

Sforno interprets: Although you can earn your living as a shepherd elsewhere, since you are my flesh and blood you should stay and work for me.

Hoffmann suggests that אָךְ has the connotation of אֵין: 'Indeed you are my

וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לְעֵקֶב הַכִּי-אָחִי אֵתָה
וְעַבַדְתָּנִי חֹנָם הַגִּידָה לִּי מַה-מְשַׁכְּרְתָּהּ;
וּלְלָבָן שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת שָׁם הִגְדָּלָה לָאָה וְשָׁם
יִהְיֶה הַקְּטָנָה רָחֵל: וְעֵינֵי לָאָה רַבּוֹת וְרָחֵל

flesh and blood' and [though you are penniless] I recognize my duty to you as a kinsman. [See *comm.* to אָבִן in 28:16.] *Targum Yonasan* also renders in the affirmative: *Indeed*.

You were quite right to come to me (*Rashbam*).

According to *Kli Yakar*, when Laban heard Jacob's account of how he outwitted Esau to obtain the blessings, he proudly said, 'Indeed, you are my flesh and blood [i.e., a man after my own heart] — you are a deceiver like me. I must therefore take you under my wing.'

Malbim, following *Alshich*, explains that Laban meant: 'Have no fear that Esau is pursuing you, Jacob, it is only you whom I consider my flesh and blood, not Esau. I love whomever my sister Rebecca loves, and if Esau comes to harm you, I will come to your defense.'

The expression *my bone and my flesh* implies: You are as dear to me as my own body (*HaRechasim leBik'ah*).

וַיֹּשֶׁב עִמּוֹ חֹדֶשׁ יָמִים — And he [= Jacob] stayed with him a month's time [lit. a month of days].

— Working for him (*Sforno*; see *Rashi* above and *Ramban* next verse).

The idiom *month of days* means a full cycle of days, when that same day falls out on the following month (*Ibn Ezra* above 4:3).

15. וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לְעֵקֶב — Then [lit. and] Laban said to Jacob.

[Presumably after the above-mentioned thirty days.]

הַכִּי-אָחִי אֵתָה וְעַבַדְתָּנִי חֹנָם — Just because you are my relative [lit. brother], should you serve me for nothing?

The Torah had not said that Jacob had been working for him; it is implied from this remark. Apparently, from the time Jacob first watered Rachel's flocks at the well [v.10] he took over her work and tended her flocks out of compassion to spare her the chore, so great was his love for her. Alternatively, Jacob may indeed have been a non-working guest for a month. Knowing that Jacob would not continue to support himself at another's expense, Laban now connived to elicit from him an offer to work for his keep (*Ramban*).

Jacob had worked free of charge all month long for Laban rather than accept charity. Indeed, his work must have been very profitable if Laban, who surely computed the cost of Jacob's room and board still described Jacob's labor as having been for nothing (*R' Hirsch*).

The translation of this passage as an incredulous question follows *Rashi*, who also expounds the grammatical rule that a past-tense verb to which the conversive-prefix ו is added may change the verb, depending upon the context, to future. Hence עַבַדְתָּנִי [past-tense, lit. you served me] with the ו conversive becomes that you will [or: should serve me].

According to *R' Bachya*, הַכִּי does not imply a question but an affirmation, as in 27:36 [following *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* cited at top of page 1152], and עַבַדְתָּנִי denotes the past tense. Thus, Laban's statement was: *Indeed you are my relative, and you have served me this past month for nothing*. Now, should you wish to remain here, then tell me what wage you desire.

29 ¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Just because you are
15-17 my relative should you serve me for nothing? Tell
me: What are your wages?'

¹⁶ (Laban had two daughters. The name of the
older one was Leah and the name of the younger one
was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were tender, while Rachel

הגירה לי מה משפחתך — Tell me:
What are your wages?

Although Jacob had been working without pay, Laban preferred to pay him — and get him to commit himself to continue on the job rather than risk losing such a capable worker (R' Hirsch).

But, at the same time, Laban was apprehensive that if he did not set a price now, Jacob would later demand more than he was prepared to pay (Malbim).

Others interpret that Laban wished to increase Jacob's liability for losses. A paid watchman [שומר] is liable for theft and loss while an unpaid watchman [שומר] is liable only for negligence. Thus, by paying Jacob, Laban would get better protection for his assets (Tur).

16. וילכן שתי בנות. — [And] Laban
had two daughters.

Before recording Jacob's response to Laban's inquiry, the Torah interjects these parenthetical verses to inform us that Laban had two daughters, the younger of whom Jacob loved. This digression prepares us for Jacob's response in verse 18 where he requested the

younger daughter in marriage (Rashbam).

The Midrash by a slight revowelization homiletically reads בנות, daughters as בנות, builders — for it was they who built the Jewish nation, since the great personages of the nation descended from them: Moses, Joshua, Samson, David, Solomon and the royal house of Israel.

שם הגרלה לאה — The name of the
older one was Leah.

The name is related to the cognate root לאה meaning wearied. Midrash Sechel Tov perceives the name as an allusion to Leah's weariness over her constant weeping and praying to avert her marriage to Esau [as explained below]. Midrash HaBiur [cited in Torah Sheleimah] interprets the name as an abbreviation of m'leah, full, signifying that she was full of wisdom and knowledge.

והם הקטנה רחל — And the name of
the younger one was Rachel.⁽¹⁾

The word means sheep, and she was so named for her skill in tending her father's sheep (Sechel Tov); according to Yalkut Reuveni, the name is a contraction which

1. Following the traditional Rabbinic chronology in Seder Olam, Leah and Rachel were twins, Leah being the elder of the two. They were born, according to the most prevalent Rabbinic view, when Jacob received the blessings. Accordingly, their age at marriage was twenty-two [the Vilna Gaon reads: twenty-one].

According to Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, Bilhah and Zilpah [whom Jacob later married] were also Laban's daughters, but by his concubines, and were therefore treated as servants [see verse 24]. Rachel and Leah were his daughters by his wife, and were older than Bilhah and Zilpah (Yafeh Toar).

וַיֵּצֵא שְׁלִישֵׁי יָחַד יִפְתָּהּ תֹּאֵר וַיִּפֹּת מִרְאָהּ: וַיֵּאָהֵב
כְּטוֹחַ יַעֲקֹב אֶת־רָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֶעֱבְדְּךָ שְׁבַע

implies that she was filled with רוח אל, a Divine [prophetic] spirit.

Midrash HaBiur explains the connotation of the name to be that she was worthy that the Shechinah might rest [שתחול=רחל] upon her.

The *Midrash* interprets הגדלה in the literal sense as the greater sister, suggesting that Leah was great in the gifts granted to her offspring. She received [through Levi and Judah respectively] the priesthood and royalty for all time [since even the future Messianic King will be descended from the House of David]. Rachel, in contrast, was the small sister — small in her gifts. Joseph held sway for but a time, and Saul [who was a descendant of Benjamin] reigned for but a short time [neither founding a dynasty]. Compare *Psalms* 78:67: *He rejected the tabernacle of Joseph and chose not the tribe of Ephraim.* [See footnote next verse.]

17. וַעֲיִי לְאֵה רְכוּת. — [And] Leah's eyes were tender [lit. watered; soft; weak].

— Through constant weeping at the prospect of marrying Esau. People used to say that since Rebecca has two sons and Laban two daughters, the elder daughter would be married to the elder son, while the younger daughter would be married to the younger son (*Rashi*).

[This view is followed by *Targum Yonasan*, *Ibn Ezra*, *Ralbag*, and *Abarbanel*. The implication of *Ramban* in v. 9, too, is that Leah's eyes were weak and that was one reason that Rachel, and not she, tended the sheep.]

Rashi's interpretation is based on Rav's view in *Bava Basra* 123a. The *Talmud* reasons that it would be inconceivable for the Torah to record a disparaging blemish on the righteous Leah for no reason at all. Even when listing forbidden animals (*Gen.* 7:8), the Torah uses the longer, more euphemistic expression אִשָּׁה טְהוֹרָה, not clean, rather than the shorter, but disparaging, expression טְמֵאָה, contaminated.

Accordingly, the *Talmud* seeks an alternative translation of רְכוּת, and an explanation of the blemish that would do credit to Leah. Rav in *Bava Basra* *ibid.* maintains that Leah's eyes were indeed weak. As *Rashbam* there explains, they were watered; full of tears, a condition that reflected her excessive weeping 'until her eyelashes fell out' over the prospect that she might be married to the wicked Esau. Thus, the weakness of her eyes was not a defect, but a symptom of her spiritual greatness.¹¹

According to the Midrashic version, Leah used to weep as she prayed: 'May it be Your will that I do not fall to the lot of that wicked man [Esau]'. R' Huna said: Great is prayer that it annulled the decree [i.e., her original destiny to be Esau's wife] and she even took precedence over her sister [i.e., she was the first to marry Jacob and she bore most of his children].

Others perceive the sense of the descriptions not as a contrast between ugliness and beauty, but between relative types of attractiveness:

Instead of saying Leah was not so beautiful, it very delicately praises her good points. Her eyes were soft and

1. The other view cited by the *Talmud* is R' Elazar's. The word עֲיִי refers not to eyes, but figuratively to leaders as we find the word interpreted in *Leviticus* 4:13, *Numbers* 15:24, and frequently in *Song of Songs*. The word רְכוּת is a shortened version of אֲרוֹכוֹת, long. The implication, as more clearly explained in *Tanchuma Yashan* and the *Midrash* above is that the blessing of leadership — priesthood and royalty — that would descend from her would be of long duration.

29 *was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance.)*
 18 ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, 'I will work for

tender whereas Rachel was *altogether* beautiful. This follows *Onkelos* who translates: *the eyes of Leah were beautiful* [יָפִי] (*Tur*).

Tur continues, however, that some explain that weak eyes were Leah's only blemish, while Rachel, on the other hand, was *entirely* beautiful.

Rashbam also takes it in the sense as *beautiful, gleaming* and cites the *Talmud* [*Taanis* 24a] that if a bride's eyes are beautiful no further description is necessary.

Haamek Davar also interprets it this way, but suggests that Leah's eyes were also tender and sensitive to the sun with the result as *Ramban* explains, that she could not tend the sheep.

יָפִי תָאֵר יוֹפֵת מְרָאָה — *Beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance.*

i.e., possessing beautiful features and a radiant appearance [complexion] (*Rashi* and almost all commentators).

[See *comm.* to יָפִי מְרָאָה in 12:11 and טָבַח מְרָאָה in 24:16.]

— *Altogether* beautiful, in comparison with Leah whose tender eyes were her only mark of beauty (*Abarbanel*, *R' Hirsch*. See *Tur* above).

18. וַיֵּאָהֱבָה יַעֲקֹב אֶת רָחֵל. — [And] *Jacob loved Rachel.*⁽¹⁾

— Since he foresaw that she was his preordained wife (*Zohar*).

The *Zohar* notes that Jacob's foreordained wife, Rachel, was encountered at a well as were Moses' and Isaac's. Leah, however, came to be Jacob's wife only in a devious manner. This was because Leah was the mate who was suited to

Jacob's higher spiritual nature; had he met her first, he would not have shown any subsequent interest in Rachel. Providence ordained that he meet and come to love Rachel before Leah since his marriage to Leah would have taken place in any event. [See *Overview*.]

אֶעֱבֹדךָ שִׁבְעָה שָׁנִים — *I will work for you seven years.*

'Do you think it is money that I seek?' Jacob replied to Laban's request that he specify his wage. 'It is your daughter for whom I came here!' (*Chasam Sofer*).

§ Jacob's voluntary separation from his parents.

[As was noted in the *comm.* to 28:5 and will be elaborated upon further in *Sidrah Vayeshev* אִיִּיָּה, Jacob was away from his parents for a total of thirty-six years, of which fourteen were spent studying in the Academy of Eber. For those years of study, he was not considered negligent for failing to honor his parents. For the other twenty-two years, however, during which he failed to return home [twenty years of service and two years of journeying] the Sages hold that Jacob was derelict. His punishment was that Joseph remained separated from him for a like number of years. As *Rashi* writes in 37:36: 'These twenty years that I have been with you,' Jacob alluded to Laban [31:41], 'were לִי, for me, i.e., the responsibility of them lies upon me and I shall yet be punished for an equal period of time.'

As explained, it was apparently Isaac's intention that Jacob stay away only long enough to take a wife, and that he be prepared to return as soon as Isaac felt it was safe enough to send for

1. [In the order of synagogue Torah reading, verse 17 is the conclusion of the second part of the *Sidrah*. Thus, there is a clear separation between the verse describing Rachel's beauty and the verse describing Jacob's love for her. The intention may be to point out that Jacob's love was not motivated by Rachel's physical beauty, but by her spiritual qualities.]

ויצא יט שנים ברחל בתך הקטנה: ונאמר לך
טוב תתי אתה לך מתתי אתה לאיש כט/יט-כ
כ אחר שבה עמדי: ויעבד יעקב ברחל

him. There is an interpretation that his mother had sent her nurse to fetch him one year after he arrived at Laban's home, but he did not leave because he was still obligated to serve Laban [see also *Rashi* to 35:8]. By *volunteering seven years of work* for Rachel — when a lesser amount might have sufficed — Jacob revealed a lack of sensitivity for his parents, and was therefore punished for all the years he was away from his father's service (except for the fourteen years of studying.)

The question arises, therefore, why Jacob obligated himself for so long a period? It is doubly difficult because the Sages infer from *Isaiah* 16:14 that one should not hire himself out for more than three years. [See *Overview*.]

[See *Tosafos Kiddushin* 17a; *Mordechai* ibid., *RaMA*, *Choshen Mishpat* 333:3, and *Ibn Ezra* to *Deut.* 15:18. See *Shach* in *Choshen Mishpat* ibid.: that for sustenance which would apparently include the case of marriage it is permitted even longer. Cf. *Minchas Chinuch* 42, and *Pardes Yosef*.]

□ *Rashi*, following the *Midrash*, suggests that Jacob's offer to work for seven years was based on his understanding of Rebecca's charge when she instructed him to flee to Laban. She spoke of a few days [27:44] and, as noted in the commentary there, the Torah often uses *days* to mean *years*. That Jacob had this understanding is alluded to in verse 20 when the Torah says that these seven years *seemed to him like a few days* [i.e., they were like the *few days* of which his mother had spoken (*Mizrachi*)].

□ The *Zohar* suggests that Jacob volunteered such a long period of servitude to prove that his desire for the beautiful Rachel was not based on physical lust. Had he felt lust he could not have suppressed his passions for so long.

□ Perhaps Rachel was still a young child [*R' Bachya* cites a version that she was but five years old at the time!] and Jacob wanted to delay the marriage until she was capable of child-bearing so his relation with her would be fruitful and entirely 'for the sake of Heaven.' Indeed, Reuben was the product of the first intimacy of Jacob's subsequent marriage (*R' Chananel*).

[As noted in the footnote to v. 16, however, the most common Rabbinic chronology, based on *Seder Olam*, has Rachel and Leah as 21 or 22 at the time of their marriage.]

□ Jacob might have volunteered fewer years of service, but he never thought that he could gain such an extraordinary woman for less than such a long period (*Chizkuni*).

□ Jacob suggested this long waiting period because it was common knowledge that *Leah* had been destined for Esau. Jacob wanted Esau to have sufficient time to come and claim his wife, so Jacob would be free to then marry Rachel. What indeed, prevented Esau from coming and marrying Leah? — Leah's tears and prayers [see comm. to v. 16, and *Tanchuma* below] (*Tanchuma Yashan*).

□ Or *HaChaim*, in a mystical interpretation, comments that the righteous Jacob constantly sought to humble himself absolutely [i.e., since the number seven symbolizes completion, seven acts of contusion represents total self-abnegation]. Similarly, Jacob bowed seven times before Esau [33:3]. After such total nullification of self, the righteous man is helped by God as Scripture states, *For seven times the righteous one falls, but he arises* [*Prov.* 24:16].

ברחל בתך הקטנה — *For Rachel your younger daughter.*

29 you seven years, for Rachel your younger daughter.'
 19 19 Laban said, 'It is better that I give her to you
 than that I give her to another man. Remain with me.'

Because he knew Laban's cunning, Jacob took care to be very explicit, saying [literally]: *Rachel your daughter, the younger*. He said that he would work for Rachel, but lest Laban wish to deceive him by substituting another woman named Rachel, Jacob specified *your daughter*. To prevent Laban from deceiving him by changing Leah's name to Rachel, Jacob specified *your younger daughter*. But all these precautions were to no avail; Laban deceived him after all (*Rashi*).

Jacob might have further suspected Laban of changing Zilpah's name to Rachel and substituting her for the bride — for, as the Sages note Zilpah was Laban's youngest daughter by his concubine. However, Jacob did not suspect Laban of stooping so low (*Sifsei Chachomim*; see *Maskil l'David*).

Jacob intended that during the seven years Rachel would reach marriageable age and in the interim Laban will be able to find a husband for Leah. This he implied by describing Rachel as *younger*: in seven years time the legitimate needs of the older Leah could be filled and the young Rachel would have matured (*Sforno*).

Furthermore, by הקטנה Jacob implied: *your insignificant* [lit. *small*] *daughter*, the one who is not as precious in your eyes as Leah, seeing that you made her a shepherdess (*Chizkuni*).

Jacob did not ask for Leah because he was afraid that if he married the older daughter [who had originally been destined for Esau], it would provoke Esau to confront Jacob with the claim: Was it not enough that you took my

birthright and blessings? Must you take my destined wife as well? (*Tanchuma*).

[The expression רחל בתך הקטנה, *Rachel your younger daughter* has accordingly become idiomatic for 'clearly spelled out terms' of a deal.]

19. טוב תתי אתה לך מתתי אתה — לאיש אחר — [It is] better that I give her to you than that I [should] give her to another man.

— Since it was considered preferable to marry one's daughter to a relative (*Radak*).

Possibly the deceitful Laban wished to suggest by this that someone else had sought Rachel's hand in marriage. However, Laban's use of 'give' in this case where Jacob would spend seven years of hard labor for her, needs amplification. In retrospect, this implication was part of Laban's cunning, for the trickster implies that he is 'giving' something away when he is in fact selling it as part of a hard bargain. [Compare Ephron's use of *give* in Chapter 23.] Somehow it seems easier to renege on a gift than on an obligation. Laban intended to 'allow' Jacob to marry Rachel in return for his work; therefore, he avoided implying in any way that a *deal* had been struck in which he was obligated to grant Jacob her hand. He would give her to him instead of to a stranger, but merely out of courtesy; Jacob would not have a legal hold on her. The only assurance Laban intended was that in return for Jacob's service he would give him prime consideration over anyone else when the time came for Rachel's marriage (*Or HaChaim*; *Malbim* explains similarly).

שָׁבָה עִמָּי — Remain [or: abide] with me.

Laban's deceitful, insincere in-

ויצא כט/כא שבע שנים ויהיו בעיניו כימים אחרים
 כא באהבתו אתה: ויאמר יעקב אל-לבן
 הבה את-אשתי כי מלאו ימי ואבואה

timation was, 'I agree to your terms: Work for me seven years and I will give you my younger daughter Rachel in marriage'. However, as noted above, Laban never specifically verbalized his *agreement* to the terms; he kept his response vague and open to later reinterpretation. So, when Laban later defended his substitution of Leah by telling Jacob that giving the younger daughter before the elder was contrary to local practice, Jacob could not point to an earlier agreement on Laban's part to the contrary; there was, in fact, none (*Alshich; Malbim*).

Laban's advice was only a stalling tactic, implying: 'Stay with me and work until it is time for her marriage' (*Haamek Davar*).

20. ויַעֲבֹד יַעֲקֹב בְּרַחֵל שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים — So Jacob worked seven years for [lit. in] Rachel.

The Torah repeats for Rachel because Jacob constantly let it be known throughout his service that he was working for Rachel. He wanted the bargain to be known to all so Laban could not deny their deal later (*Or HaChaim*).

ויהיו בעיניו כימים אחרים — And they seemed to him [lit. and they were in his eyes] like a few days.

Like the few days his mother had intended (*Mizrachi*; see *Rashi* to v. 18).

בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֶתָּה — Because of his love for her.

It was only his profound affection for Rachel that permitted Jacob to consider these seven long years as

if they were only the few days his mother had described; had he not had this great love for Rachel, they would have truly seemed to be the many years that they were (*Mizrachi*). [See Overview.]

... For 'love upsets the rule of normal conduct' [*Sanhedrin* 105b] (*Sforno*; [cf. *Rashi* to 22:3 s.v. וַיִּחַבֵּשׁ]).

In his love for her — Jacob's love for her accordingly exceeded his love for himself (*Machazeh Avraham*).

Midrash Lekach Tov contrasts this with the afflictive period of Egyptian servitude which the Torah notes were of 'many' days [*Exodus* 2:23].

The seven years seemed but a few days — because Jacob thought that he should have given an even bigger dowry [i.e. work an even longer period of time] for her (*Sforno*).

Tzeidah laDerech interprets to the contrary, that in Jacob's great love for her, the time went so slowly that they seemed like single days rather than years. Thus, Jacob said later: for my days are fulfilled.

21. ויאמר יעקב אל-לבן. — [And] Jacob said to Laban.

After seven years, Laban said nothing; Jacob was forced to approach Laban to remind him of their arrangement (*Ralbag*).

הִבָּה אֶת אִשְׁתִּי כִּי מָלְאוּ יָמִי — Deliver [lit. give] my wife [i.e. the woman we designated to be my wife (*Haamek Davar*)] for my term is [lit. my days are] fulfilled.

- 29 20 So Jacob worked seven years for Rachel and they
20-21 seemed to him a few days because of his love for her.
 21 Jacob said to Laban, 'Deliver my wife for my
 term is fulfilled, and I will consort with her.'

The term of my work is fulfilled (Onkelos).

I.e., the term [=the days] to which my mother referred [when she sent me to you is now complete. I can procrastinate no longer: I must return home (Mizrachi; Tzeidah laDerech)]. Another interpretation: 'my days [i.e., the years of my life] are full. I am already 84 years old [Jacob was 63 when he left home+14 years in the Academy of Eber+7 years of service with Laban=84], and unless I marry now I may be too old to have twelve tribes. [Jacob knew prophetically that he would have twelve sons. See comm. to 28:16 that it was indicated by the coalescing of the twelve stones.] This is what Jacob meant by adding the seemingly indelicate term וְאֶבְרָחָה, and I will consort with her [see below] (Rashi).

Ramban (v. 27) objects to both of Rashi's interpretations. If Jacob would have asked Laban to let the marriage take place before the seven years were over, he would have to advance reasons such as his mother's wishes or his advancing age. But since, according to Rashi, the seven years were over, Jacob required no special indulgence from Laban; he should have said simply, as Onkelos renders our verse, 'my term of service is complete, and I am entitled to my bride.' For, indeed, his fulfillment of the agreement was surely a stronger argument than either Rebecca's wish or his age!

Mizrachi defends Rashi, saying that the crafty Laban could invent reasons to delay the marriage even though the seven years were up. Jacob therefore considered it necessary to present his claim to Rachel together with a factor that ruled out any consideration of further delay.

The dispute between Rashi and Ramban hinges partly on the interpretation of מְלָא שָׁבַע וְאֶחָד (v. 27). Rashi, following Onkelos, interprets it as the week of this one, i.e., the seven days of this bride's marriage feast. However, the word שָׁבַע could also be rendered as this period of seven years, since it is a collective noun that refers to an indefinite group of seven; what 'seven' means always depends on the context. If so, Jacob's special request in our verse could be understood differently: Jacob had not completed his stipulated years of service, but because of his mother's wish or because of his own age, he asked Laban to permit the marriage. Though Laban acquiesced, he nevertheless demanded that before Jacob would be permitted to Rachel in addition to Leah, that Jacob complete this seven-year period of work [v. 27].

In another interpretation, Ramban notes that the Torah does not specifically say וְיָחַד בְּמִלְאוֹת הַיָּמִים, and it came to pass after the days were fulfilled. Accordingly, he suggests that Jacob approached Laban in the seventh, and final [calendar] year of the agreement, and asked for his wife. Jacob reasoned that a term which was nearly complete may be considered fulfilled for all practical purposes, and that he could be trusted to continue his service for the remaining days of his obligation. [Haamek Davar takes this in the sense that Jacob waited seven 354-day lunar years, while Laban insisted on full 365-day solar years. See also comm. to v. 27].

Rabag interprets similarly, that Jacob was married before the conclusion of the seven years. As proof he cites his version of the chronology of years during which Jacob's children were born. (This will be dealt with in the following chapter.) Abarbanel insists however that interpretations such as the above take too many liberties with the simple context of the verse, which would seem to indicate that he did fulfill the term, and as

וַיֵּצֵא כַּבֵּד-כֹּד כַּבֵּד וַיֵּצֵא מִשְׁתָּהּ: וַיְהִי בְעֶרְבַּ וַיִּקַּח אֶת-לֵאָה
 בֶּד בָּתּוּ וַיָּבֵא אֶתָּה אֵלָיו וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ: וַיִּתֵּן
 לָבָן לָהּ אֶת-זֹלְפָה שִׁפְחָתוֹ לְלֵאָה בָּתּוֹ

Rashi interprets, Jacob referred to his advancing years.

וַיָּבֹאֶה אֵלֶיהָ — And I will consort with her.

[As Rashi notes above, Jacob's primary concern was that he was advancing in years]. That is why he added 'I will consort with her', for surely even the commonest of people would not use such an expression! Jacob wanted to emphasize that he was intent on begetting offspring [to fulfill his Providential destiny, and not that he was concerned with physical gratification] (Rashi following Midrash).¹¹

— 'Let us proceed directly with the marriage instead of making the customary waiting period after the betrothal,' such was Jacob's urgent desire to acquire the Godly heritage of children (*Sforno*).

Or HaChaim writes that Jacob added this seemingly immodest remark to avoid a misapprehension. It would have seemed logical that the valuable labor of seven years would serve as the money which would affect the betrothal. This form of betrothal Jacob could not consider since wages due for services rendered are halachically considered a loan, and loans are not valid for betrothal (see *Rambam*, *Ishus* 5:20). Therefore, Jacob used

the expression, and I will consort with her to imply that the betrothal would be consummated by *bi'ah*, cohabitation, which is one of the three means of betrothal. [See *Mishnah Kiddushin* 1:1; *Even HaEzer* 28:16; and *Malbim*.]

According to Ramban [v. 27 (see above)] who holds that Laban gave Leah to Jacob before the completion of the seven years. Jacob's statement should be rendered literally *וַיָּבֹאֶה אֵלֶיהָ* and I will come to her. His intent was, 'Do not fear that I will take my bride and leave your service. Rather, I will come to her, because I must remain here to complete my term of service. [Accordingly, as Ramban explains there, Laban later told Jacob that before he could marry Rachel he must first *מלא שבץ זאת*, complete the balance of the seven year term for this [wife i.e., Leah] (v. 27) and then marry Rachel.]

Abarbanel, too, renders the literal sense: *And I will come to her*, i.e. I will make a home with her and come home to her after working in the field, and no longer feel like a boarder in your home.

22. Leah is married to Jacob

וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתָּה — And made a feast.

The Midrash notes that Laban as-

1. R' Bachya explains that Jacob's remark can be considered improper only to the standards of ordinary people, of whom such talk would betray loose morals and a loose tongue. The Patriarchs, however, were above physical lust. They determined their actions by the dictates of their intellect.

To Jacob, cohabitation was not an animalistic act, but the means of fulfilling God's will that he have twelve sons. Similarly, Adam and Eve needed no clothing before their sin, because all organs of their bodies were above lust and were dedicated to the service of God.

22-24 ²² So Laban gathered all the people of the place and made a feast. ²³ And it was in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to him. And he consorted with her.

²⁴ — And Laban gave her Zilpah his maidservant — a maidservant to Leah his daughter.

sembled all the people of that place to tell them of his plan to substitute Leah. Laban knew that the Charanite economy had improved drastically since Jacob's arrival. Charan had been plagued with drought, and now all the wells were brimming over. Realizing that this had resulted from Jacob's merit, Laban devised this scheme to force Jacob to spend another seven years there in order to gain permission to marry Rachel whom he loved.

[The term *משחה*, from the verb *שחח*, *drink*, refers to a feast where wine is served as *Sforno* explains in 19:3 and 21:8].

This wine-feast was but another of Laban's deceitful ploys: He desired to muddle Jacob so that Leah could be substituted unnoticed. Note that he did not make such a feast at the marriage of Rachel since this was not necessary (*Daas Zekeinim*).

Furthermore, the presence of so many people would reassure Jacob that no trickery was being perpetrated and he would not consider it necessary to scrutinize his bride. Additionally, since so many guests would concur in effect, with Laban's later claims that older sisters must be married first, Jacob would be ashamed to divorce her when he realized the deception (*Malbim*).

23. *וַיְהִי בָּעֶרְבַּי* — And it was in the evening.

The word *וַיְהִי* is often Midrashically interpreted to suggest trouble [*וַיְהִי*=*וְהָיָה*, *there was woe*; see *comm.* to *Esther* 1:1; *Ruth* 1:1]. Here, too, there was an element of tragedy in that evening of deception (*Or HaChaim*).

וַיִּקַּח אֶת-לֵאָה בָּתּוּ וַיָּבֵא אֶתָּהּ אֵלָיו — Then [lit. and] he, [=Laban] took Leah his daughter.

The phraseology suggests that Leah had no desire to deceive Jacob but Laban took her against her will. Or it suggests that he *persuaded* her [this being the Biblical connotation of *take* as explained in the *comm.* to 2:15 and 12:5] (*Or HaChaim*).

וַיָּבֵא אֵלָיו — And he [=Jacob] consorted with her [i.e., consummated his marriage with her.]

— In sanctity, silence, and in the darkness of night as the laws of modest conduct demand. Thus, he did not recognize her (*Chizkuni*; *Or HaChaim*).

24. Laban presented Zilpah to Leah on the wedding night (*Radak*).

וַיִּתֵּן לָבָן לָהּ ... לְלֵאָה בָּתּוּ שִׁפְחָה — And Laban gave [to] her ... a maidservant to Leah his daughter.

The Torah interjects this fact because giving Zilpah to Leah on the wedding night played an important part in Laban's scheme to deceive Jacob: Zilpah was younger than Bilhah and should have gone to Rachel the younger daughter.

וַיֵּצֵא כֹה שָׁפָחָה: וַיְהִי בִבְקָר וְהָנָהּ הוּא לֵאמֹר
 כַּס/כה-כו וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-לָכֵן מֵהַזֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי הֲלֹא
 בְּרַחֵל עֲבַדְתִּי עֹמֶר וְלָמָּה רָמִיתִנִּי:
 כו וַיֹּאמֶר לָכֵן לֹא-יַעֲשֶׂה כֵן בְּמִקְוֵמֹנוּ לָתֵת

That she was presented to the bride was another factor in Laban's deception of Jacob (*Midrash Ag-gadah*).

The syntax of the Hebrew is difficult, and apparently redundant.

Or *HaChaim* infers that Bilhah and Zilpah had been the personal maidservant of Laban's late wife and she had bequeathed them, one to Leah and the other to Rachel. Laban, however, in his normally overbearing, deceitful manner, acted as though he were their owner and to 'give' Zilpah to Leah as indicated in the first half of the verse. But in reality, the verse goes on to inform us, Zilpah was already Leah's property because her mother had given her to Leah his daughter as a maidservant.

R' Hirsch observes that the Torah emphasizes that Laban was careful to give Zilpah לָהּ, to her, not to Jacob, but expressly לְלֵאָה, to Leah as her own personal property. This has later significance, for when Jacob married Zilpah a few years later, he could have done so only on the initiative of Leah, to whom she belonged.

זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחָתָה — אֵת וְלֵאָה שִׁפְחָתָה — Zilpah his maidservant.

As noted in the *comm.* to v. 16 Zilpah was Laban's daughter by a concubine. Such offspring were commonly referred to as 'maidservants' (*Chizkuni* based upon *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).

Her mother had been a maidservant; hence she, too, is called maid-

servant (*Midrash HaBiur*; *Torah Sheleimah* note 73).

Zilpah's name was appropriate, for her eyes, too, flowed with tears [מְלֻפּוֹת] in sympathy for her mistress, Leah, who had been assumed to be Esau's future bride (*Sechel Tov*; *Torah Sheleimah* *ibid.*).

25. וַיְהִי בִבְקָר וְהָנָהּ הוּא לֵאמֹר — And it was, in the morning, that [lit. and] behold it was Leah!

— But at night she was not [distinguishable as having been] Leah because Jacob had given Rachel a prearranged sign [by which he could always recognize her; see footnote to v. 12]. When Rachel saw that they were about to substitute Leah for her, she confided the sign to her so that she would not be put to shame (*Rashi* from *Megillah* 13b).

According to the version in *Eichah Rabbah*, [Proem 14], already before the wedding Rachel had discovered the planned deception and got word of it to Jacob. In order to frustrate Laban's plan, she gave a sign by which he would be able to distinguish between her and her sister Leah. Later, however, Rachel had pity on Leah. She therefore, disclosed the secret signal to her sister so Jacob should think Leah was she. Furthermore, she even hid in the bridal chamber and answered whenever Jacob spoke so that he could not recognize Leah by her voice ... ¹¹

1. The *Midrash* [*Eichah Rabbah* *ibid.*] records in this context that when the Temple was destroyed and Israel was exiled, each of the Patriarchs and Moses came to implore God to be compassionate on their sinful descendants for their sake. Each of them related the suffering he had endured without questioning God's justice. But they all failed to stir God's Mercy.

Then the Matriarch Rachel related to God that on her long-awaited wedding night, she sup-

25 And it was, in the morning, that behold it was
 25-26 Leah! So he said to Laban, 'What is this you have
 done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I worked for
 you? Why have you deceived me?'

26 Laban said, 'Such is not done in our place, to

לִי מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי — *What is this you have done to me?*

[An incredulous rhetorical outburst, as if to say, 'How could you have perpetrated such a great injustice against me?' Comp. God's similar rebuke to Cain in 4:10; Pharaoh's and Abimelech's to Abraham in 12:18 and 20:9; and to Isaac in 26:10.]

הֲלֹא בְרַחֵל עָבַדְתִּי עִמָּךְ — *Was it not for Rachel that I worked for [lit. with] you?*

— As I kept making clear throughout my period of service! (Or HaChaim to v. 20).

Why did you not give me the woman for whom I worked? (Malbim).

וְלָמָּה רָמִיתִנִּי — *[And] why have you deceived me?*

— Why did you give me the daughter I did not want? (Malbim).

Why did you have to accomplish your desire by resorting to deceitful methods; you could have approached me regarding Leah in a

rational manner. It is unseemly for a man to marry the woman with whom he will spend the rest of his life, in such an underhanded way (Or HaChaim).

26. Laban justifies his wicked act by shifting responsibility. He portrays himself as having been pressured into it because the community or some vague body to which he belongs compelled him to act in this way (Hoffmann):

לֹא יֵצֵא כֵן בְּמִקְוָמוֹנִי — *Such is not done in our place.*

Our citizenry will not permit it (Ramban, end of v. 27); the people would not allow me to keep my word [they would prevent me from giving you Rachel, even if I wanted to] (Sforno).

According to the Midrash, this excuse was false, since, as noted in v. 22, the townspeople had agreed to back any course designed to force the continued blessed presence of Jacob. Convinced that their prosperity was dependent on his

pressed her desire and disclosed her secret signal to her sister to spare her from becoming humiliated. She concluded: 'And if I, a creature of flesh and blood, formed of dust and ashes, was not envious of my rival and did not expose her to shame and contempt, why should You, a King Who lives eternally and is Merciful, be jealous of vain idolatry, and exile my children? You have let them be slain by the sword, and their enemies have done with them as they wished!'

Immediately, the mercy of the Holy One, Blessed be He, was stirred, and He said, 'For your sake, Rachel, I will restore Israel to their place.' And so it is written [Jeremiah 31:14ff]: ... A voice is heard in the upper spheres, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be consoled for her children for they are gone.

This is followed by: Thus said HASHEM, 'Withhold your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; your deeds shall be rewarded ... and there is hope for your future', said HASHEM 'and your children shall return to their own border.' [Rashi to Jeremiah 31:14 records a slightly different version of the Midrash.]

וּיצֵא כֹס וְנִתְּנָה לָהּ גַּם־אֶת־זֹאת בְּעֶבְרָה אֲשֶׁר

residence among them, they were ready to concur in any tactic chosen by Laban.

The fact that Jacob accepted Laban's excuse teaches that local custom prevails over other conditional arrangements (see *Shach, Choshen Mishpat* 61:4, cf. SMA. See also version in *Yerushalmi Yevamos* 12:1; *Bavli Menachos* 32a). [For additional references regarding marriage to a younger sister before the elder see note to *Torah Sheleimah* 77.]¹¹

לָתֵת הַצְעִירָה לִפְנֵי הַבְּכִירָה — *To give the younger [i.e. in marriage] before the elder [or: firstborn].* ¹²

This would be considered a shameful act by them (*Ramban, ibid.*).

Laban said: 'It is the custom in this area, that if someone asks to marry a

younger sister, he automatically includes the unmarried elder one, as we do not consider it correct to marry a younger sister before the older one. Therefore, in order to get the younger daughter, one first marries the elder. It's all perfectly in order: After Leah's marriage comes Rachel's' (*R' Hirsch*).

'Do not imagine that I have reneged on my promise to give you Rachel, or that I wished to force you to marry Leah. On the contrary, I have done this in order to keep my promise to you regarding Rachel. You see, in our place I cannot give you Rachel until Leah is married. Of course, I could allow someone else to marry her in return for seven years of service, but then you have to delay your marriage to Rachel for seven years because I will not trust another person to keep his promise after having married Leah. Thus, by giving you Leah now, I am making it possible

1. Certain halachic ramifications are elicited by the *Poskim* from Laban's remark.

R'vid HaZahav cites a halachic dispute on this matter recorded by the *Tosafists* in *Kidushin* 52a. A question came before Rabbeinu Tam regarding the son of R' Oshaya Halevi who betrothed a certain woman by saying to her father, 'Your daughter is betrothed to me,' without specifying which daughter. Rabbeinu Tam decided that in any event the oldest daughter was thereby betrothed since, as Laban's statement demonstrates, it is improper to marry off a younger child before an older one. Others, however, disagree.

That a *halachah* is derived from the behavior of the devious *Laban* rather than from the example of the righteous Jacob who, in fact, *did* want to marry the younger daughter first, is explained by *Maharsham*: Laban's insistence on not embarrassing his older daughter was purely a matter of *halachah* — נִימוֹס וְדֶקָה אֶרֶץ כְּלֶבֶד, *propriety and etiquette*. It is for this reason that we follow suit.

Similarly, the Sages derived several other laws from Laban: That *one festive occasion cannot be mingled with another*, is derived in *Yerushalmi Moed Katan* from *קִלַּם שִׁבְעַת זֹאת*, *complete the week of this one* (v. 27), i.e., the marriage of Rachel was to be delayed until Leah's festivities were over. That a maiden is entitled to twelve months to prepare for marriage is derived from *חֲשֵׁב הַנַּעֲרָה יָמִים*, *let the maiden remain with us a year*.

Similarly, from the fact that Laban had blessed his sister Rebecca prior to her marriage to Isaac [*ibid.* v. 60], the Sages in *Tractate Kallah* derive that bride and groom should be blessed (*בִּרְכַּת חַתָּנִים*).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the custom of Laban's people to marry off the older daughter first should have been adopted as a Jewish custom in the absence of extenuating circumstances.

2. Some perceive in Laban's emphasis on the qualifying phrase *our place* and on *firstborn* rather than *elder* a snide reference to Jacob's dealing with Esau:

Perhaps in *your place* such things are done, that the younger takes precedence over the firstborn; that his portion is taken away and given to another, and that the younger is given the status of firstborn. But such things are not done in *our place*, to give the younger before the firstborn! (*Maasei HaShem*).

29 give the younger before the elder. ²⁷ Complete the
27 week of this one and we will give you the other one

for you to marry Rachel now (Malbim).

[Of course, Laban's pieties were transparently dishonest. He had entered into an arrangement with Jacob without informing him of the local 'custom'. Furthermore, he had had seven years in which to arrange Leah's marriage.]

27. A new agreement is made for Rachel

מלא שבוע זאת — Complete the week of this one.

— The week, i.e. the seven days of the marriage feast, of this woman [Leah] as noted in Yerushalmi Moed Katan (Rashi).

Rashi goes on to explain that this translation is demanded by the punctuation, since שבוע is in the construct state: week of. Accordingly זאת implies: of this woman. It could not mean this [calendar] week, for two reasons: it would then have to be punctuated שבוע, and furthermore since שבוע is masculine the phrase would have had to read זה שבוע. Accordingly, the word שבוע which connotes a unit of seven [see Rashi on Exodus 10:22] here refers to the seven days of the wedding feast for זאת, this wife.

[Thus, as is derived in the Yerushalmi cited in the footnote to v. 26, since two celebrations should not be mixed, Laban directed Jacob to wait until the seven days of feasting for Leah would be completed, and then he could marry Rachel. Yafeh Toar observes that though these were the deceitful Laban's words, the halachah that מערבין שמחה בשמחה, one period of rejoicing may not be mixed with another, may still be derived from them, for if they did not conform to the Law, they would not have been included in the Torah.]

Ramban, in a long dissertation, cites

Yerushalmi Kesubos 1:1 that the seven-day rejoicing period after a marriage feast was an ordinance established by Moses [and not introduced by Laban]. He suggests, however, that already in the time of the Patriarchs the custom may have been practiced, as also was the seven-day period of mourning [see 50:10]. And while in the Yerushalmi [Moed Katan 1:7] and Midrash the Sages deduce from this incident of Laban and Jacob that two celebrations should not be mixed [see footnote to v. 26], their deduction is merely a סמך בעלמא, a Scriptural allusion; the halachic requirement, however, is not deduced from our verse. In our Gemara, (Bavli, Moed Katan 9) the Sages derived the halachic requirement not from Laban's statement, but from Solomon's feasts at the dedication of the Temple. He celebrated a total of fourteen days — seven in honor of the new Temple, and seven in honor of Succos [I Kings 8:65]. That Solomon did not combine both occasions into a single seven-day celebration is taken to indicate that every period of rejoicing is entitled to the exclusive attention of its celebrants. See Tosafos ibid. 8b.

[As noted in the comm. to v. 21, Ramban holds the שבוע in our verse refers to the seven years of service, not the seven days of feasting. Thus, according to the interpretations that Laban claimed to have — or actually had — given him Leah before the expiration of the seven years, his offer in our verse was as follows: Since Jacob had not yet completed the stipulated seven years of service, he should finish that initial period in payment for Leah, then begin a new period in payment for Rachel. Perhaps Laban was intimating a suspicion that Jacob might retaliate for the deception by refusing to work the balance of the seven years.]¹¹

1. Malbim interprets differently: Complete this week, i.e., the seven days of feasting, and then be free to marry Rachel by virtue of the years you have already worked. As far as Leah is

וַיֵּצֵא כַח/כח-ל כח
 תַּעֲבֹד עִמָּדִי עוֹד שִׁבְע־שָׁנִים אַחֲרוֹת: וַיַּעַשׂ יַעֲקֹב כֵּן וַיִּמְלֹא שִׁבְעַת זֹאת וַיִּתֵּן-לוֹ כט
 אֶת-רָחֵל בְּתוּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: וַיִּתֵּן לָכֵן לְרָחֵל בט
 בְּתוּ אֶת-בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחָתוֹ לָהּ לְשִׁפְחָה: 5
 וַיָּבֹא גַם אֶל-רָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר גַּם-אֶת-רָחֵל

And we will give [to] you the other one [lit. this one] too.

— Immediately after the seven days of marriage festivities for Leah (see *Rashi* below).

The use of the plural *we* possibly reflects the manner of speakers as if they speak in the name of many [i.e., the so-called plural of majesty; see 1:26 (*Radak*)].

Specifically by using the plural *we* will give, Laban might have been intimating that although marriage to the younger daughter before the elder had the disapproval of the residents of that place since it violated their conventions, this new arrangement regarding marriage to Rachel would have the approval of the entire community: *we will all* take part in the event. We shall all honor you, and give you a banquet as we did at the first wedding (*Ramban*).

As *R' Hirsch* explains, by saying 'we,' Laban tries to make it sound as if his duplicitous proposal was the accepted legal procedure.

The translation of וַיִּתֵּן in first-person plural, synonymous with וַיֵּצֵא, and *we will give* follows *Rashi* who cites the similar forms בִּרְדָּה, וַיִּשְׂרַף, and *let us burn* [11:3,7], the ו being merely conjunctive. *Ibn Ezra* and *Rashbam* interpret the word in the *niph'al* [passive] tense with the ו being conversive — changing it from past to

future: And this one too shall be given to you.

[*Be'er Yitzchak* suggests that *Rashi* chose this rendering because if it were in the *niph'al*, the accusative article אֶת which always stands before the direct object would be grammatically superfluous (accordingly, most commentators adopt *Rashi's* first interpretation, while *Radak* cites both).]

— For the work which you will perform for me.

I.e., *we will give you the other one [=Rachel] too* — immediately after the seven days of marriage festivity; — in exchange for the work you will do for me after your marriage (*Rashi, Rashbam*).

That Jacob was first given Rachel and then worked the additional seven years is clearly corroborated by v. 30 (*Mizrachi*).

— Yet another seven years.

[This time it was *Laban* not *Jacob* who set the term. Because *Jacob* and *Rachel* were to be married before the work would begin, it was now to *Laban's* advantage that there be no ambiguities, so he made sure the terms were clearly agreed upon.]

28. *Jacob acquiesces.*

וַיַּעַשׂ יַעֲקֹב כֵּן — So *Jacob* complied [lit. and *Jacob* did so].

Jacob apparently perceived the hand of Providence. He therefore,

concerned, וַיִּתֵּן לָהּ זֶה אֵת זֶה, *this one has already been given* (past tense) to you. In payment for the marriage which has already taken place, you must give me seven years of work. I would not make such an arrangement with anyone else — but I know you are honest and will keep your word. I am doing this so that you can marry *Rachel* immediately.

29 too, for the work which you will perform for me yet
28-30 another seven years.'

²⁸ So Jacob complied and he completed the week for her. And he gave him Rachel his daughter as his wife for him. ²⁹ And Laban gave Rachel his daughter Bilhah his maidservant — to her as a maidservant. ³⁰ He consorted also with Rachel and loved Rachel

acquiesced to Laban's suggestion, although in normal circumstances he would not have consented to marry two sisters (*Tanchuma*; see footnote, further).

וַיִּמְלֵא שָׁבַע זֶמַן — And he completed the [bridal] week for her [i.e., for Leah].

Following *Rashi*; according to *Ramban*: He completed the initial seven years of service.

וַיִּתֵּן לוֹ אֶת־רַחֵל בְּתוּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה — And he [=Laban] gave him Rachel his daughter as a wife for [lit. to] him.⁽¹⁾

I.e. a woman suitable to be לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה, a wife to him (*Lekach Tov*); a wife who would be his helpmeet in building a home as we find in 25:20 in the case of Isaac and Rebecca. In the case of Leah, however, the expression לוֹ, to him, does not appear for she could not be called a wife in the sense of becoming his partner so long as he was not aware of her identity and agreeable to accept her (*Haamek Davar*).

וַיִּתֵּן לָבָן לְרַחֵל בְּתוּ ... לָהּ לְשִׁפְחָה — And Laban gave [to] Rachel his daughter ... to her as a maidservant.

[See comm. to v. 24].

וַיִּתֵּן לָבָן לְרַחֵל בְּתוּ ... לָהּ לְשִׁפְחָה — Bilhah his maidservant.

She was the older of Laban's daughters from his concubine (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*; see comm. to v. 24).

Her name which incorporates the root בָּהַל, alarm; implies that she was alarmingly beautiful, or that she was alarmed and distressed [בָּהֳלָה; cf. *Isaiah* 17:14] at her mistress' inability to conceive (*Sechel Tov*; *Torah Sheleimah* 82).

30. וַיִּבְּאֵהוּ גַם אֶל רַחֵל — He [=Jacob] consorted [i.e. consummated his marriage] also with Rachel.

— As he had with Leah (*Radak*).

וַיֵּאָהֱבָה גַם רַחֵל מֵלֵאָה — And [he] loved Rachel even [lit. also] more than [lit. from] Leah.

The Torah mentions this because

1. The question of how Jacob, who kept the entire Torah before it was given, married two sisters, which is forbidden in *Leviticus* 18:18 is discussed in the commentary to 26:5 on page 1083. [Cf. footnote to 35:19.]

There is a further opinion that Rachel and Leah were considered as גֵּרִים, proselytes, and hence all former familial ties were severed. Accordingly, they were not considered sisters in the legal sense, and were permitted to him (*Chizkuni*; cf. comm. to 32:5).

There is a reference in *Pesachim* 119b that at the great feast God will make in the World to Come, Jacob will be offered the cup with which to lead the Grace after Meals. He will demur saying, 'I cannot lead because I married two sisters, which is forbidden by the Torah.'

Jacob's refusal on those grounds is explained by *Gur Aryeh* to 46:10 to mean that though Jacob might not have been subject to the prohibition, he felt it would be improper for him to lead the Grace at the greatest banquet in the world. [See *Maharsha Pesachim*, *ibid.*]

וַיֵּצֵא מִלֵּאָה וַיַּעֲבֹד עִמּוֹ עוֹד שְׁבַע-שָׁנִים
 בַּטָּלָל לֵב לֹא אַחֲרוֹת: וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי-שָׂנְאָה לֵאָה
 לֵב וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת-רַחֲמָהּ וְרָחֵל עָקְרָה: וַתֵּהָרֶה

it is common for a man to feel more love for that woman with whom he lived first, just as the Sages observed [*Sanhedrin* 22b] that a woman's primary emotional commitment is to him who marries her first. That Jacob's love for Rachel was an exception to the rule is inferred by the superfluous word *גַּם*, *even* [which always implies an extension; as if to imply: Though he consorted first with Leah he *still* (גַּם) loved Rachel more] (*Ramban*).

R' Hirsch derives from the phraseology that Jacob loved Leah too, realizing, perhaps that she, like him, may have been deceived by Laban, that she was not a party to any willful deception. [See וַיִּקַּח in v. 23.] The verse is telling us that although he loved Leah, *Jacob also loved Rachel* — and indeed — more than Leah. [This is in agreement with *Bereishis Zuta* and *Radak* who explain that the reference in v. 31 to Leah's being 'hated' was only in the *relative* sense: it seemed that way compared to Jacob's intense love for Rachel; cf. *Haamek Davar*.]

וַיַּעֲבֹד עִמּוֹ עוֹד שְׁבַע שָׁנִים אַחֲרוֹת —
 And he worked for him yet another seven years.

The apparently superfluous word *אַחֲרוֹת*, *another*, is included in order to draw a comparison with the first seven year period: In this second period of seven years he served with the same loyalty as in the first seven, although they were the consequence of deceit (*Rashi*).

31. The Birth of the Tribes

Hoffmann perceives great significance in the alternating use of the Names *HASHEM* and *ELOHIM*, representing, respectively, God in His manifestation of Mercy, and in His manifestation as the Judge and as the Ruler of Nature.

When Leah gives birth to her first four sons, the Heavenly gift of children is described as having come from *HASHEM*, the Attribute of Mercy, in response to Leah's wounded feelings as the less loved wife. On the other hand, when Rachel protested to Jacob concerning her barrenness, he responded that *ELOHIM*, not he, had deprived her of children. This response must be understood in the light of the Sages' tradition that all the Matriarchs were naturally barren (*Yevamos* 64a; *Bereishes Rabbah* 45:5; *Tanchuma Vayeitzei* 7). Jacob told Rachel that she was no different from Sarah and Rebecca who had likewise been created by the God of nature without the ability to conceive. The implication was that Leah would have been no different had her personal plight not inspired God's mercy.

This theme will be followed through in the commentary as the narrative proceeds:

וַיֵּרָא ה' — [And] *HASHEM* saw [i.e., perceived].

It was only *HASHEM* Who saw; Leah herself noticed nothing (Or

29 even more than Leah. And he worked for him yet
31 another seven years.

³¹ HASHEM saw that Leah was unloved, so He opened her womb. But Rachel remained barren.

HaChaim), since Jacob was fulfilling his obligation to her in an entirely commendable manner (*Haamek Davar*).

It was in His Aspect of HASHEM – Dispenser of Mercy – that God perceived that insufficient love was accorded Leah (*Hoffmann*).

Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:48 explains that the phrase HASHEM saw should be anthropomorphically explained as: *It became manifest to HASHEM*.

Ramban, however, interprets it in this context to imply: *God had compassion on her* because she was unloved [see below].

כי שונאה לאה – *That Leah was unloved* [lit. *hated*].

.. Jacob resented the fact that she cooperated with her father's scheme and pretended to be Rachel; she should have let Jacob know whom she was. Indeed, the *Midrash* teaches that he decided to divorce her. God, however, knew that her motivation was pure. She wished to be married to the righteous Jacob (*Ramban*).

Ramban goes on to cite the opinion of Radak that *hated* is used in the *relative* sense. Leah noted Jacob's intense love for Rachel (v. 30), and in comparison she felt hated. Therefore God saw her 'affliction'.

וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת רִחְמָהּ – So [lit. and] He opened her womb.

According to the *Midrash* expounded by Ramban: Since God perceived that Leah cooperated in her father's scheme because of her intense desire to marry the righteous Jacob [rather than her destined husband, the wicked Esau (see v. 16)], He had compassion on her and gave her children so Jacob would not divorce her. As the *Midrash* states: When the Holy One, Blessed be He, remembered Leah by giving her children, Jacob said, 'Shall I divorce the mother of these children?'

According to Radak's interpretation, God saw Leah's suffering as the less loved wife, and He compassionately gave her children. The expression *He opened her womb* implies that before that act of God, she, too, was barren.

וַיִּרְחַל עֲקָרָהּ – But [lit. and] Rachel [remained] barren.

The word 'remained' is not in the Hebrew but its implied presence follows Radak who explains that both Leah and Rachel were barren, but God had pity on Leah as explained above. Rachel, however, remained barren until God opened her womb much later (see 30:22). [*Sforno* interprets similarly.]¹¹

The Torah mentions this fact

1. Not only Rachel, but all the Matriarchs were naturally barren but finally conceived. Only Leah, for the reason stated, and in HASHEM's Mercy, was allowed to conceive soon after her marriage. See footnote to page 542; comm. to 25:21 and footnote to page 1050 for reasons that the Matriarchs were so long barren.

Among the reasons for the Matriarch's barrenness cited in 25:21 from *Yevamos* 64a, is

now to prepare us for Rachel's outburst in 30:1 (*Rashbam*).

According to the *Midrash*, the term עֶקְרָה is related to עֵיקְרָה, the principal of the household. Even though Leah bore children, רָחֵל, עֶקְרָה, Rachel remained the mainstay of the household.

32. Reuben.

וַתִּהְיֶה לֵאָה וְתָלֵד בֵּן — [And] Leah conceived and [she] bore a son.

Leah conceived — from their first union — and she bore a son seven months later (*Midrash*).

The proximity of the two terms וַתִּהְיֶה, and she conceived, and וְתָלֵד, and she bore, indicates the swiftness with which the births took place, after a pregnancy of only seven months. This phrase appears in the case of all the children who were born in Charan [with the exception of Zilpah's pregnancies — see *Rashi* to 30:10]. All those children were born after seven month pregnancies. The exception was Benjamin who was born on the way back to Canaan (*R' Bachya*).

[See 30:17 where the *Tanchuma* notes that whenever the terms וַתִּהְיֶה and וְתָלֵד appear together, they imply painless childbirth. Just as the conception was painless, so was the birth.]

[The chronology follows chapter 2 of *Seder Olam*; *Pirkei d'Rabbi*

Eliezer chapter 36. Cf. *Yalkut, Exodus* 1.]

Furthermore, *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* *ibid.* notes that with each child, a partner [i.e., future wife] was born [they were twins — male and female; see *ibid.* chapt. 39]. No partner was born with Joseph, for Asenath, Dinah's daughter, was destined to be his wife, nor was a partner born with Dinah.

This follows one opinion in the Talmud [*Sanhedrin* 58b] that marriage to a maternal sister is permitted a Noachide [a designation which included even our ancestors before the giving of the Torah]. However, the *halachah* as codified by *Rambam* in *Hilchos Melachim* 9:5 follows the other view; though marriage to a paternal sister was permitted a Noachide, marriage by a Noachide to his maternal sister was prohibited. See *Rashi* to 20:12. On this *Midrash* regarding marriage of the tribal ancestors to twin sisters, see *comm.* to 37:35 and 38:2 where *Ramban* advances the opinion that the intent was that the sons of Leah married the twin sister of the other children.

וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן — And she named him [lit. called his name] Reuben [literally meaning 'see a son.']

— See the finely built, clever son that the Holy One, Blessed be He, has given me! (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).

[The first reason for the name is as given by the Torah; For *HASHEM*

'Because the Holy One, Blessed be He, longs to hear the prayer of the righteous,' i.e., because such prayers publicize the efficacy of prayer. God therefore gives them cause to pray so He can miraculously and publicly fulfill their requests.

Malbim here takes the view that Leah was destined to be the barren sister, but since she was the unloved one, Jacob presumably would not have prayed for her. Accordingly, God's purpose in causing the Matriarchs to be barren — to evoke the prayers of their righteous husbands — would have been negated. He therefore, opened Leah's womb and let Rachel remain the barren one.

has seen my humiliation. Similarly, the Torah gives reasons for all the names Leah gave her other children. The Sages, however, perceived deeper significance in this name which Providence placed in her mouth and which was appropriate to Reuben's destiny]:

The Sages interpreted Reuben's name to mean: ראו בין, *see between*. Leah [prophetically] declared: *See the difference between my son and the son of my father-in-law [i.e., Isaac's son Esau] who sold his birthright to Jacob [voluntarily, and yet later hated him (27:41)] whereas my son did not [voluntarily] sell his birthright to Joseph [see below], but he did not complain concerning his loss. Moreover, he even tried to save Joseph from the pit [see 37:21]. [As the firstborn, Reuben should have had the distinction of being considered two tribes. However, because Reuben defiled his father's couch (see comm. to 35:22) his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph (I Chron. 5:1) with the result that Ephraim and Menashe became separate tribes (Rashi from Bera-chos 7b).]*^[1]

The Vilna Gaon explains why the Sages (*ibid.*) offered a new interpretation of Reuben's name, but did not feel compelled to do so for

the other names. He explains that it is the custom of Scripture to state a reason or cause, and *then* to state the result. For example, in the case of Simeon, Leah first said that HASHEM had heard her despair, then she gave the name which alluded to God's response. In Reuben's case, the name is given before the reason. This prompted the Sages to infer that the name was based upon some cause in addition to that given later in the verse (*Kol Eliyahu*).

Torah Temimah notes that of all the names of Jacob's children, the Sages in the *Talmud* interpret only Reuben's name. He explains that Reuben's name appears to have particular significance because, according to the reason Leah gave: *Because HASHEM saw my humiliation*, the name should have been *Reu-anyi*. Therefore, the Sages sought an additional prophetic interpretation of the name Reu-ben [see *Maharsha*].

כי אמרה — *As she had declared.*

Usually, the future converseive is used: נתאמר. The past-perfect כי אמרה, as she had said [which is how R' Hirsch renders the phrase] might imply that *already during pregnancy* Leah had said that her imminent childbirth proved that HASHEM saw her affliction and vindicated her (*Daas Soferim*).

1. The Halachah is clear that חמורה, children born of a union during which the husband thought of another woman — even another one of his wives — are considered blemished.

Since Jacob thought he was with Rachel the first night, why was Reuben not included in this blemished category?

Magen Avraham to *Orach Chaim* 240:2 explains that this applies only to a case where one's mind is on one person and he consummates the act with another. In the case of Jacob, however, he saw Leah at the wedding ceremony and his intention was focused on the woman he married, but he thought that her name was Rachel. Thus, his case was distinct from one who thought of anyone other than the woman whom he knew to be with him.

וַיֹּצֵא אֶמְרָה כִּי־רָאָה יְהוָה בְּעֵינָי כִּי עָתָה
 בַּטֹּל־לֵד לֵב יֵאָהֲבֵנִי אִישִׁי: וַתֵּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן
 וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה כִּי־שָׁנוּאָה אֲנֹכִי
 וַיִּתֶּן־לִי גַם־אֶת־זֶה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעוֹן:
 וַתֵּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתֹּאמֶר עָתָה הִפְעָם
 לִדּוֹה אִישִׁי אֵלַי כִּי־יִלְדָתִי לוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה

Because [i.e., I am giving him this name because] *HASHEM* has discerned my humiliation [following Onkelos; others render affliction, suffering].

— God saw my humiliation in that my husband suspected me of willfully deceiving him that night. Thus, by granting me children [of that very same union] God vindicated me, as it were (*Sforzo*).

Leah specifically acknowledges that this child — as well as the next — was granted her by God in His Attribute of *HASHEM* — the Dispenser of Mercy (*Hoffmann*).

In the case of her second child, Leah later declares that *HASHEM* heard that she was unloved, while here, speaking of her humiliation, she uses the term *saw* which describes the perception of something more substantial. Leah's feelings of rejection before the birth of Reuben were so plain that they could be

seen. That she remained relatively unloved until the birth of her second child was more subtle — the condition could only be *heard* [in the tone of Jacob's voice] (*Tanchuma*; see *Kli Yakar* v. 33).

As R' Hirsch explains, the successive names show how Jacob's attitude toward Leah became increasingly loving with each child she presented him. At first *הִי בְעֵינֵי* *HASHEM* has 'seen' my humiliation, because Jacob's preference for Rachel was so obvious that it was visible. With the birth of Reuben, that degree of preference dissipated, but Leah detected in the tone of Jacob's voice to Rachel, that she, Leah, still did not possess Jacob's full love, so she called her second son: Simeon, from the verb *שמע*, *hear*.

Emphasizing how the names of the tribes prognosticated the destiny of her descendants, *Targum Yonasan* adds: For my affliction has been manifested before God as will be the affliction of my children before God when they shall be enslaved in the land of Egypt.^[1]

1. The name of each tribe incorporates a reference to Israel's redemption. [The *Midrash* cites only nine names, however]:

Reuben recalls the verse [Exodus 3:7]: *I have surely seen* [=רָאָה אֶת־יִי] the affliction of My people;

Simeon [=Shimon] — *God heard* [=שָׁמַע] their groaning [Exodus 2:24];

Levi — *And many nations shall join themselves* [=נִלְוִי] to *HASHEM* [Zech. 2:15];

Judah [=Yehudah] — *And in that day you shall say, 'HASHEM, I will praise* [=אֶדְבָּר] *You'* [Isaiah 12:1];

Dan — *But also upon the nation which they shall serve will I execute judgment* [=דָּן] [Gen. 15:14];

Naftali — *sweetness drips* [=תִּסְפָּדָה] *from your lips* [Song of Songs 4:11];

Gad, recalls the Manna, described as being like coriander [=גִּד] seed [Numbers 11:7];

Asher, recalls the redemption — *And all the nations shall call you fortunate* [=וְאָשֶׁר] [Malachi 3:12];

Joseph — *And it shall come to pass in that Day that HASHEM shall set His hand again* [=יָסִיד] *the second time to recover the remnants of His people* [Isaiah 11:11].

29 has discerned my humiliation, for now my husband
33-34 will love me.'

³³ And she conceived again and bore a son and declared, 'Because HASHEM has heard that I am unloved, He has given me this one also.' And she named him Simeon.

³⁴ Again she conceived, and bore a son and declared, 'This time my husband will become attached to me for I have borne him three sons.'

כי עתה יאהבני אישי — For now my husband will love me.

— As much as he loves my sister (Radak).

It is axiomatic that when one has two wives, God will cause the less beloved wife to bear the first son. This will draw her husband's love to her because the firstborn son is the one who performs God's service [as was done before the Kohanim were appointed], and this will cause his father to exult, as Abarbanel explains in Deuteronomy 21:15: and the firstborn is hers that is hated (Kli Yakar).

— God has seen my humiliation and vindicated me; does it not follow that עתה יאהבני אישי, my husband will now love me? (Ralbag).

The *pasach* vowel under the ב [instead of the more usual form: יאהבני] is similar to the vowelization of חרבקני [above, 19:19] (Ibn Ezra); יבדילני [Isaiah 56:3] (Radak). [Cf. HaKsav V'HaKabbalah.]

33. Simeon

וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן — [And] she conceived again and bore a son.

He was born within the following seven months (Seder Olam).

וַתֹּאמֶר בִּי שָׁמַע ה' בִּי שְׁנוּאָה אָנֹכִי — And declared, 'Because HASHEM has heard that I am unloved.'

Although Leah had hoped that her husband would love her because

of Reuben's birth [v. 32], now that she again referred to herself as unloved she apparently realized that she had been wrong. The very fact that God gave her a *second* child before Rachel gave birth to her *first* indicated to her that she was still hated. She was unaware of it, but 'שמע ה', HASHEM — Who searches the innermost recesses of the heart — 'heard' it and responded with this child (Kli Yakar, cf. Or HaChaim).

[And] He has given me this one also.

To make me more beloved to my husband and eradicate any last traces of ill feeling he might have had toward me (Kli Yakar).

וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעוֹן — And she named him Simeon. [Hebrew Shim'on, from the root שמע, to hear.]

Just as You heard that I was hated and You gave me this child, so may You hear the prayers of my descendants when they are enslaved in Egypt (Targum Yonasan).

34. Levi.

עַתָּה הִפָּעַם יִלְוֶהָ אִישִׁי אֵלַי — This time my husband will become attached [Hebrew yilaveh, literally: will join; escort; or: will become associated] to me.

— In a bond of affection stronger

ויצא בנים על-בן קרא-שמו לוי: ותהר עוד בטלה

than the one with my sister (Radak).

The intent is that his *principal dwelling* will now be with me (Heidenheim).

— The Matriarchs were prophetesses and knew that Jacob was to beget twelve tribes by four wives.^[1] Now that Leah had three children she said, 'Now my husband will have no cause for complaint against me, for I have given him my full share of children' (Rashi).

— Now she emphasized the *positive* aspect of her relationship with her husband and expressed her hopes for *full* recognition (Rabag).

With the birth of her third son, she was confident that her relationship with Jacob would henceforth be one of pure, undiluted love. This concept is expressed by the name Levi which is related to לִוְיָה, *association*, and לוֹוֶה, *debtor*. When two people are ideally attached to one another, each feels indebted to the other for his happiness and very life. The significance of this attitude is pointed up by the fact that Jacob himself conferred the name as the verse clearly states: קָרָא, *he*, called (R' Hirsch) [see *comm.* below].

— This time my husband will be united to me because I have borne him three sons; so may my children be united to serve God (Targum Yonasan).

According to the Zohar, it was a known tradition that only one of

Jacob's wives would be buried along with him in the Cave of Machpelah. Her outburst here reflected her joy at the prognostication that since she bore three sons [before any of the others], now her husband will be joined to *her*, and it would be *she* of Jacob's wives who would share eternal repose alongside him in the Cave of Machpelah.

[The verb לִוָּה in its meaning of *join, be joined*, occurs often in Scripture. Compare its various connotations, for example, in Ecclesiastes 8:15 קִלְוֵנוּ: Esther 9:27 גִּלְוִים: Isaiah 56:3 הִנְלִיחָה אֵל ה'. *joined to HASHEM*. As R' Hirsch explains above, the cognate verb meaning *borrow* accordingly refers to the fact that the borrower considers himself beholden to the lender.]

בנים — כי לִוְיָה לוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָּנִים — For I have borne him three sons.

— And the righteous take wives in order to have children (Radak).

Now that I have borne three children, I established that I am capable of bearing many, for, as the Sages said [Bava Metzia 106b]: A presumption [*chazakah*] is established when it occurs three times and this will ensure that my husband will cleave to me (Sforno).

על-בן קרא שמו לוי — Therefore He named him Levi.

In the case of the others it is stated *she* called, while here the tense is masculine: *He* called. The subject here is God. The *Midrash*

1. Actually, of all the Matriarchs, only Sarah is listed in the Talmud (Megillah 14a) among the seven prophetesses. That Rashi describes all the Matriarchs as prophetesses is no contradiction. The Talmudic list includes only those who were prophetesses to society; however, there were many others — the Matriarchs among them — who prophesied in matters that concerned themselves and their families (Maharshah).

Maharsha *ibid.* cites Rebecca as an example of this rule. Although not a prophetess, she was credited with a momentary surge of Divine Inspiration as explained in the *comm.* to 27:45 s.v. לָקַח אִשְׁכֵּל.

Torah Temimah, however, cites Midrashic opinions — for example Yerushalmi Berachos 9:5; Midrash Shocher Tov 105; Seder Olam 21 — which maintain that the Matriarchs were prophetesses.

Devarim Rabbah states that God dispatched Gabriel to bring the infant before Him, whereupon God named him Levi because his offspring would be 'escorted' throughout history by the twenty-four priestly gifts. [These gifts include various sacrificial gifts and tithes which are given by Israel to the *Kohanim*, the offspring of Levi] (*Rashi*).

— And this child, not the first-born Reuben, would accordingly be endowed with the role of performing God's service (*Or HaChaim*).

Kli Yakar raises the point that the Midrashic reason is at variance with the one stated by the verse. He explains that, in the days when the Divine service was performed by the firstborn, parents felt a special pride in their firstborn sons, a pride that would express itself in an attachment to the mothers who had borne them. As noted above, Reuben was to lose this privilege as a result of his future behavior. The performance of this service would be conferred upon Levi with the result that Jacob would feel indebted to Leah, mother of the tribe.

According to those who pursue the simple meaning of Scripture [e.g. *Radak*, *Rashbam*, *Abarbanel*, *R' Hirsch* (see above) *Malbim*] 'he' refers to Jacob who 'acquiesced to Leah's declaration and in acknowledgment, named the child Levi.

As *Radak* explains: Jacob named him in accordance with Leah's wish because he rejoiced in the birth of Levi. It may also be that Jacob saw prophetically that Levi's offspring would be servants of God and teachers of the Torah, and as such, would be attached to God.

Thus, as the *Midrash* notes, the name *Levi* signifies that he was destined to 'lend' [*l'avos* — the *hiphil* conjugation of the root of *Levi*] his sons to the service of their Heavenly Father. [Alternate translation: He was destined to *escort* his children to their Heavenly Father.]

Rashi, citing the *Midrash*, notes that all those sons in connection with [whose naming] Scripture uses the expression על כן, therefore, became very populous tribes. Levi was an exception because the Ark consumed so many [of the Levites who were careless in safeguarding its holiness when they carried it in the wilderness (*Gur Aryeh*)] (*Rashi*).

[Cf. also incident with *Uzza* in *II Samuel* 6:6-7.]

The expression על כן was used in connection with three tribes: Judah, Dan, and Levi. Judah and Dan were, indeed, the most populous of the tribes at the time of the Exodus, but Levi was small even then (see *Numbers* Ch. 2 and 3). *Gur Aryeh* explains that there were two factors in the great population growth of the Jews in Egypt: the normal blessing of God, because of which Levi, too, grew out of proportion to normal expectations; and a special blessing in response to Pharaoh's attempts to deplete the Jewish population through enslavement. Levi was not included in this second blessing because the tribe never volunteered for servitude. Therefore, had Pharaoh not attempted to kill Jews, Levi, Judah, and Gad would have been the largest of the tribes. As it was, Levi still grew at a far greater than normal rate.

Sefer HaParshiyos adds that *Rashi's* comment concerning the death of Levites can apply only to the family of *Kehas* which carried the holiest parts of the Tabernacle.

Harav David Feinstein notes that the population figures in *Numbers* would seem to contradict *Rashi's* assertion that the labors around the Tabernacle depleted the Levites. In *Numbers* 3:39, the population of the tribe is given as 22,000 while forty years later, it stood at 23,000 (*ibid.* 26:62). *Harav Feinstein*

וַיֵּצֵא לֵא / וַתֵּלֶךְ בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר הַפֶּעַם אֹרְחָה אֶת־יְהוָה
עַל־כֵּן קָרָאָה שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה וַתַּעֲמֵד
מִלֶּדֶת: וַתֵּרָא רָחֵל כִּי לֹא יֵלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב

submits that since only the Kehasites died from carelessness around the Tabernacle, we may assume that *that* family decreased during the forty years while the Levite families of Gershon and Merari grew in accordance with the blessing accruing to the tribe of Levi.

Torah Sheleimah cites a version in *Bereishit Rabbah* that this exegesis refers only to those places where it says *קָרָאָה*, therefore 'she called', a formula which occurs only in the case of Judah and Dan, both of whom were, indeed, populous.

35. Judah.

הַפֶּעַם אֹרְחָה אֶת־ה' — *This time let me gratefully praise* [Hebrew *odeh*, related to *Yehudah*] *HASHEM*.

Because [with the birth of this, Jacob's fourth child] *I have had more than my share* [inasmuch as I have borne him more than a quarter

of the twelve tribes he is destined to beget (see *Rashi* v. 34)]. I should henceforth thank *HASHEM* (*Rashi*); [bracketed additions are from the *Midrash*].¹¹

— Because His bounty suffices me, and I will desire no more (*Ibn Ezra*).

The *Talmud* [*Berachos* 7b] mentions that 'from the day the Holy One, Blessed be He, created His world, no man praised Him until Leah came and praised Him.' [See *Maharsha* and *Torah Temimah*].

With the birth of the three previous sons, she considered how each would benefit her personal situation. By now she was secure in her position in the household — she could now enjoy her new baby for

1. As cited in the *Overview* to ArtScroll *Ruth* [page xxxvii], *Rashi* explains that when Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she gave special thanks because God had given her more than her share. That is why Jews are called *Yehudim* (implying that they are descended from Judah) no matter what tribe they belong to. Even Mordechai, a Benjaminite, is referred to in *Megillas Esther* as *Morechai haYehudi*. We are *Yehudim* because we always thank God for giving us more than our share, more than we deserve. The Jew is ever conscious of the graciousness and mercy of God. To him, health, prosperity — life itself — are never his by right; he thanks God for everything, for it is all an undeserved gift (*Chiddushei HaRim* in *Sefer haZechus*).

The strength of Judah lay in his readiness to be a willing receptacle of God's talent, blessing, and responsibility while ascribing nothing to himself. His very name indicates this quality. The Hebrew spelling of Judah's name, יְהוּדָה, contains the sacred four-letter name of God — plus one more letter, a *tau*, *dalet*. The word *דל*, *dal*, in Hebrew means a pauper. Judah has within himself the majesty of his Creator; his kingship is no less than the kingship, in a mortal guise, of God Himself, — but in his own eyes, Judah remains *דל*, a pauper. No matter how exalted his position, whatever he has is an undeserved gift of God.

David, first of the Judean kings and model for all his successors, embodies the same concept in his name. It begins with *dalet* and ends with a *dalet*. For all his grandeur and achievement, for all the love his Maker bore for him and the holiness that made even the blood of his war victims seem like holy offerings before the altar of God, David, from beginning to end, considered himself a pauper, an impoverished mortal who carried only the gifts of God, but nothing of his own. The future Mashiach is described by Zechariah as *רוכב על חמור*, a poor man riding a donkey. He will finally fulfill the purpose of creation by bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to earth and by crowning God as King of all mankind — but he is a pauper riding the humblest of domestic beasts of burden.

Such kings represent the final stage of revelation. They are themselves but an embodiment of God's will on earth (*Sfas Emes*, *Vayigash*).

29 ³⁵ She conceived again, and bore a son and
35 declared, 'This time let me gratefully praise
 HASHEM.' Therefore she named him Judah. Then she
 stopped giving birth.

30 Rachel saw that she had not borne children to
1 Jacob, so Rachel became envious of her sister. She

its own sake. She exclaimed, 'Now I can thank God for the gift of a child' — and she named him accordingly (*R' Hirsch*).

This time will I give praise before God; from this son, kings shall descend and from him shall spring King David who will offer praise to God (*Targum Yonasan*).

עַל־כֵּן קָרָאָהּ שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה — Therefore she named him Judah [Hebrew: *Yehudah*].

— Which contains letters referring to HASHEM's Name as well as to 'thankfulness' and 'praise' (*Sforno*; see footnote).

וַתִּעְצֹם מֵלֶדֶת — Then she stopped [from] giving birth.

For the following interim period. This was part of the Divine scheme, in order to allow even the maid-servants to bear Jacob's children (*Radak*).

[The commentators note that our verse seems to link her expression of thanksgiving with the cessation of her childbearing, as if the thanks was the cause of the cessation.]

Ibn Ezra comments that her thanks contained the implication

that she was satisfied to have given birth to four sons and desired none more. Her lack of desire to participate further in the building of Israel caused her to be punished by being temporarily denied further children.

Abarbanel goes further, commenting that she had already achieved her purpose of being loved by Jacob, and felt no need for more children.

Others give more universal reasons for this occurrence:

— *Maor VaShemesh* comments that whenever one thanks God for past benefits, he should also pray for continued Heavenly goodness, lest he imply that he no longer needs God. Leah failed to do so with the result that she ceased to conceive.

— The *Chozeh of Lublin* comments that the time to give thanks does not come while God's blessings continue to flow. While the blessing is in progress, one should accept it. The time for thanks is when God completes the blessings. By thanking God prematurely, Leah indicated that she wanted no further blessing.

XXX

1. Jacob marries Bilhah.

וַתֵּרָא רָחֵל בִּי לֹא יֵלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב — [And] Rachel saw that she had not borne [children] to Jacob.

וַתֵּרָא רָחֵל בְּאֵחָתָהּ — So [lit. and] Rachel became envious of her sister.

[Although envy is a prohibited trait, the *Midrash* explains that

וַיִּצְא לָב וַתִּקְנָא רָחֵל בְּאַחֶתָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-יַעֲקֹב
הֲבֵה-לִּי בָנִים וְאִם-אֵין מִתָּה אָנֹכִי:
ב וַיַּחֲרֹאֶף יַעֲקֹב בְּרָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר הַתַּחַת
אֱלֹהִים אָנֹכִי אֲשֶׁר-מָנַע מִמֶּךָ פְּרִי-בֶטֶן:

Rachel's envy was wholesome and laudable:] She envied Leah's *good* traits thinking, 'Had Leah not been more righteous than I, she would not have deserved to bear children' (Rashi).

הֲבֵה-לִּי בָנִים — Give me children.
I.e., Pray on my behalf! (Ibn Ezra).

[She attributed her barren state to Jacob's failure to pray for her as Isaac did for Rebecca:] Did your father act this way toward your mother? Did he not pray on her behalf? (Rashi).

Rachel intended this remark to urge Jacob to implore God even more vigorously than he might have already been doing; that he should fast, don sackcloth and ashes, and persist in prayer until she would be granted a child ... Furthermore, her implication was that the matter was up to *him*, for Jacob was of no lesser stature than his father who had successfully implored God to end his wife's barrenness (Ramban, verses 1 and 2).

וְאִם-אֵין מִתָּה אָנֹכִי — Otherwise [lit. and if not], I am dead.

'If you do not pray and gain children for me, I will remain childless and be regarded as dead.' Knowing of his love for her, she sought to goad him by frightening

him with her death from grief (Ramban).

From this description it is learned that he who is childless may be regarded as dead (Rashi).⁽¹⁾

The *Midrash* [see *Yafeh Toar; Akeidas Yitzchak*] continues: Jacob tried to console her by explaining that only the *wicked* are regarded as dead if they are childless since they leave nothing positive behind them after their death. When someone like Rachel is childless, however, her good deeds are considered her offspring. But Rachel was not comforted, and continued her pleas.

Her remark is to be understood in the same spirit as that of the eunuch who says [Isaiah 56:3]: *Behold I am a dry tree* (Sforno).

The word *מתה*, *dead*, is accented on the second syllable and is in the present tense with a future connotation: *I will be considered [as] dead*. In 48:7, however, where the accent is on the first syllable, the connotation is past tense: *מתה עלי רחל*, *Rachel died on me* (Rashbam).

[In many *Chumashim*, however, the cantillation of *מתה* in 48:7 is erroneously over the ה: in correct editions following the Mesorah, however, there is a double cantillation over both the מ and ה, with a Masoretic marginal note that the first syllable is to be accented indicating the past tense. See *Minchas Shay*.]

וַיַּחֲרֹאֶף יַעֲקֹב בְּרָחֵל — Jacob's anger flared up at Rachel.

Jacob was angered by her

1. The Sages [Nedarim 64b; Midrash] taught that four may be regarded as dead: The leper, the blind, he who is childless, and he who is impoverished.

Rashi cites the latter three in our Sidrah: the blind in 28:13 s.v. וְאֵלֶּיּוֹ יִצְחָק; the childless here; the impoverished in 29:11 s.v. וַיִּבְכֶּה. That a leper may be regarded as dead is derived from Numbers 12:12.

said to Jacob, 'Give me children — otherwise I am dead.'

² Jacob's anger flared up at Rachel, and he said, 'Am I instead of God Who has withheld from you fruit of the womb?'

implication that it was in his absolute power as a righteous man to assure her children, and by her improper tactics in attempting, like a spoiled wife, to frighten him with her death (Ramban).

Radak and Sforno similarly suggest that he was angered by her insinuation that he had God-like power to grant her children. In his zeal for the honor of God, he disregarded his love for his wife. Had she said, 'Pray for me,' Radak continues, her request would have been quite valid and Jacob would not have been provoked to anger.

According to Or HaChaim Jacob's anger was aroused because Rachel uttered a curse against herself by saying she would die unless she could give birth. Even in such subtle ways, a righteous person's remarks are effective. (See 31:32 regarding Jacob's curse and how it later affected Rachel.) This is why the verse adds *בְּרַחֵל*, at Rachel, i.e., Jacob's anger at her remark was intended for her own sake, to spare her from the result of her careless remark.

[That a righteous person's unintentional prognostications can be fulfilled as if by prophesy is discussed in the footnote on pages 1164-5 citing the dictum from Moed Katan: *ברית כריתה לשפתים*, a covenant has been made with the lips.]

The phrase *וַיִּחַר אָפוֹ* is idiomatic and metaphorically means and his nostrils flared. Rashi in Exodus 15:8 explains that this expression is used to describe fierce anger since, when one is angry,

the nostrils flare up and become 'hot.' Conversely, when one's anger subsides, he is described as *וַיִּתְקַרְרֶה נְפֻשׁוֹ*, his mind became cooled.

The word *וַיִּחַר*, from the root *חרה* [adj. *חרון*] has several connotations. Rashi in Numbers 16:15 explains it as meaning *grief, annoyance* (*נִצְטָעַר*). Onkelos to Exodus 15:7 renders the term *וַיִּתְקַרְרֶה לִיה* and he became angered. Rashi to Exodus 15:8 explains the root *חרה* to denote burning, hence *heated anger* [see below]. R' Hirsch to Gen. 4:5 similarly renders *burnt*, denoting 'irritation by something we consider unfair.'

Generally speaking, the anger described as *חרון אף*, flared up anger [or burning wrath] or *אף*, anger, refers to outwardly displayed vexation, while terms such as *חֲקָה*, burning wrath, describe the harsher, deep-seated but repressed inner anger. [See Radak Shorashim; Ibn Janach; Malbim to 27:45.]

הִתְחַח אֱלֹהִים אֵנִי אֲשֶׁר־מֵנַע מִמֶּךָ — *Am I instead* [following Rashi; lit. *beneath*] of God Who has withheld from you fruit of the womb?

There are several connotations here:

Why do you complain to me. Am I to blame for your condition? Am I in God's place? It is He not I, Who has withheld children from you! Moreover, I am not the barren one — it is from you that God withheld children, not from me; I already have children (Radak; Abarbanel; Malbim).

[Continuing the dialogue

ויצא לו וְתֹאמַר הִנֵּה אֲמַתִּי בִלְהָה בָּא אֵלַיהָ וְתִלְדַּל עַל-בְּרִכִּי וְאִבְנָה גַם-אֲנֹכִי מִמֶּנָּה:

recorded in the *Midrash*:

You say that I should do as my father did [and pray on your behalf]. But I am unlike my father: He had no children at all [therefore his prayer for himself was efficacious (see *Ramban* below)]; but I have children. God has withheld children from you — not from me (*Rashi*).

Within the context of this Midrashic dialogue cited by *Rashi*, *Ramban* wonders at Jacob's response and remarks: Do not the righteous pray on behalf of others? Elijah and Elisha prayed even on behalf of strange women! [*I Kings* 18:2; *II Kings* 4:33].

Ramban concludes, therefore, that on account of this insensitive response the Sages took Jacob to task, stating in the *Midrash*: The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Jacob, 'Is this the way to answer an aggrieved person? By your life! Your children [by your other wives] are destined to stand humbly before her son Joseph!'⁽¹⁾

Ramban goes on to suggest that Jacob undoubtedly prayed for her, but his prayer had gone unanswered. Accordingly, Jacob's 'anger' was meant to ad-

monish her for her improper outburst, and to emphasize that the righteous have no *absolute* power that their prayers would be answered, regardless of any other considerations. Accordingly, it was not in *his* power to grant her children but in God's, since He had withheld children from her. Moreover, Jacob wanted to stress that her reference to Isaac's prayers was inappropriate; Isaac's prayer had to be heard because he was destined to have children, whereas Jacob already had children so it was unlikely that his prayer would be answered. Furthermore, it was from *Rachel* that God withheld children.

... The result, *Ramban* concludes, was that the righteous Rachel went to pray on her own behalf. This is implied by v. 22: *And God listened to her*.

Similarly, we do not find that Elkanah prayed on behalf of Hannah. Presumably the reason was the same: he already had children by Peninah, so Hannah had to pray on her own behalf [*I Samuel* chapt. 1.]

Rashi discards the literal translation *Am I 'beneath' God?* because *all* people are indeed beneath God. Therefore, he renders *am I* instead of *God* (*Devek Tov*).

1. Several answers are offered to *Ramban's* question:

— *Mizrachi* contends that prayer is appropriate only to fill a void: one may pray for something he lacks or that someone else lacks. However, one cannot pray for something which he *has*. In the case of Jacob and Rachel, any offspring granted to her by God would be Jacob's child as much as hers. Therefore, Jacob, who already *had* children of his own, could not properly pray as if he were a childless person begging God to fill a void in his life. *Nimukei Shmuel*, however, objects to *Mizrachi's* limitation on the efficacy of prayer commenting: 'Is God's power limited?' Rachel assumed that she was capable of bearing children, but that God had decreed that she not do so.

— *Maaravi* comments that Jacob knew prophetically that he would have a total of twelve sons no matter who their mothers would be. For him to pray that *Rachel* have children would be, in effect, a request that the privilege of giving birth to them should be taken away from other potential mothers. It is improper to pray for one person at the expense of another.

— *Divrei David* suggests that she pleaded with Jacob to pray that God rescind His decree. Jacob replied that it was not a case of a *decree* at all, rather she lacked the *physical capability* of conceiving and carrying a child. In that case, Jacob's prayer would be tantamount to asking God to create a new being. That is not ordinarily within a *tzaddik's* power.

³ She said, 'Here is my maid Bilhah, consort with her that she may bear upon my knees and I too may be built up through her.'

The *Shaloh*, however, explains the connotation of *am I beneath God?* to be: Am I then in *Eretz Yisrael* which is considered directly 'beneath' God in merit, that my prayers should be answered, as were those of Abraham and Isaac whose prayers were offered in the Holy Land? It is not my fault that my many prayers on your behalf have gone unanswered!

3. הִנֵּה אִמְתִּי בִלְהָה — Here is my maid Bilhah.

— According to the *Midrash*, Rachel's offer was preceded by the following dialogue continued from above. Rachel said:

'[You say your circumstances are unlike your father's because your father had no children.] But your grandfather Abraham already had children from Hagar and yet he girded his loins [i.e., actively interceded to pray] on Sarah's behalf!

Jacob answered, '[Then do as my grandmother did.] My grandmother took a rival wife into the house.'

'If that is the only impediment,' Rachel said, 'Here is my maid,

Bilhah, consort with her ... and I, too, may be built through her, just as Sarah was built through her maidservant.' (Rashi; [bracketed additions are from the *Midrash*]).⁽¹⁾

The Hebrew term אִמָּה, *maid*, which Rachel used for Bilhah is more delicate than the term שִׁפְחָה [maidservant; slave woman] which Sarah used of Hagar. This was because, as noted in 29:29, Bilhah was Rachel's half-sister, Laban's daughter by a concubine (*Baal HaTurim*).

בָּא אֵלַי — Consort with her [i.e. marry her (see on 16:2).]

וְתִלְדַּי עַל-יְרֵכַי — That [lit. and] she may bear upon my knees.

[This is a figurative expression meaning] and I will rear [the children she will bear] (*Onkelos*; Rashi).

וְאֶבְנָה גַּם-אֲנִי מִמֶּנָּה — And I, too, may be built up through her.

The word *too* implies: just as Sarah was built through her maid-

1. Actually, we find it nowhere explicitly stated that Abraham prayed for a child through Sarah after Ishmael was born. In fact the reverse seems to have been the case: When given the news that the covenant would be maintained by the son whom Sarah would bear, Abraham exclaimed, 'O that Ishmael might live before you!' [17:16-31].

Gur Aryeh suggests that it is axiomatic that the righteous Abraham prayed for such a son, since God would not have granted such an unsolicited favor. If God granted him a son through Sarah, Abraham must have strongly desired it and prayed for it though it is not recorded in the narrative [Compare *Gur Aryeh* to 2:5 where he explains that no rain fell on earth before Adam existed since there was no one to appreciate it, 'and it is prohibited to bestow a favor on one who will not appreciate it.' God therefore waited for man to recognize the need and pray for rain. Only then did He grant it.]

Sefer HaZikaron suggests that Abraham's prayer might be alluded to in the expression [17:3] *Abram fell upon his face*, which immediately precedes God's promise of Isaac. [Rashi there, however, explains that Abraham literally fell to the ground since he was uncircumcised and unable to stand in God's Presence.]

R' David Cohen suggests that since the reason our Matriarchs were barren was, 'because the Holy One Blessed be He longs to hear the prayers of the righteous,' [Yevamos 64a], it is axiomatic that Abraham prayed for his barren wife.

וַיֵּצֵא וַיִּתֵּן-לוֹ אֶת-בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחָתָהּ לְאִשָּׁה
וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ יַעֲקֹב: וַתֵּהָר בִּלְהָה וַתֵּלֶד
לְיַעֲקֹב בֶּן: וַתֹּאמֶר רַחֵל דְּנַנִּי אֱלֹהִים וְגַם
שָׁמַע בְּקֻלִּי וַיִּתֵּן-לִי בֶן עַל-כֵּן קָרָאתָ
שְׁמוֹ דָּן: וַתֵּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחָתָהּ
רַחֵל בֶּן שְׁנֵי לְיַעֲקֹב: וַתֹּאמֶר רַחֵל

servant Hagar (Rashi; see above).

According to Radak and Sforno, the implication is: 'I, as well as my sister ...'

The experience may stimulate me to normal bearing (Sforno).

The expression *אֵבְנָה*, I may be built, is the same expression used by Sarah under similar circumstances in 16:2. The translation *built up* follows Rashi there, that since a childless person may be regarded as demolished, the reward of earning God's compassion by bringing a rival into the house will be that one will be 'built up' by having children.

Most others, however, [see Rambam to Mishnayos Nazir 2; Ibn Ezra] interpret *אֵבְנָה* as a play on the word *בֶּן*, son, and render: And I too may have children through her. For, as Midrash Sechel Tov explains, in ancient times the servant bore and the mistress raised the child and was regarded as its mother.

4. וַתֵּתֵן-לוֹ אֶת-בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחָתָהּ לְאִשָּׁה — So [lit. and] she gave him Bilhah her maidservant as a wife.

Rachel freed her, so she would become his full wife in order that there should be no trace of servitude in Jacob's progeny as would have been the case had any of the children been born of a maidservant (Zohar; Targum Yonasan) [See on

v. 5: וַתֵּלֶד לְיַעֲקֹב, and she bore to Jacob.]

5. וַתֵּהָר בִּלְהָה — [And] Bilhah conceived.

[See comm. of Heidenheim cited to 16:4, page 542.]

וַתֵּלֶד לְיַעֲקֹב בֶּן — And bore [to] Jacob a son.

In the case of all the maid-servants, it is emphasized that they bore a son to Jacob to indicate that he desired those children and acknowledged their status as equal to his sons. [This is evidenced by the blessings he gave them before his death, treating everyone with full equality. Also, these children, like those of Leah and Rachel, produced leaders and judges (Radak)]. The same phrase is used also of Leah's fifth and sixth sons [verses 17 and 19] to emphasize that though she had borne many children, Jacob nevertheless desired and befriended all of them; for this reason this phrase is not used in connection with the earlier children [of Leah since it is obvious that Jacob desired and showed affection to them] (Ramban).

Sforno compares the attitude of Rachel and Leah with that of Sarah. Because God would declare that only Isaac could be considered Abraham's spiritual heir, Hagar was

⁴ So she gave him Bilhah her maidservant as a wife and Jacob consorted with her. ⁵ Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. ⁶ Then Rachel said, 'God has judged me, He has also heard my voice and has given me a son.' She therefore named him Dan.

⁷ Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸ And Rachel said,

not set free even after marrying Abraham [see 16:3]. In the case of Jacob's family, however, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah would be of equal status with the others. Therefore, Rachel and Leah did not want them to bear the stigma of subservience.

6. Dan.

וְתִתֶּנִּי רָחֵל — Then [lit. and] Rachel said.

— [Bilhah had borne the child, but it is accounted to Rachel, so it is she who gives the name as she did in the case of Bilhah's second child in verse 8. Similarly, in the case of Zilpah's children in verses 11 and 13, it is Leah who names them.]

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים — God has judged me.

[The verb *דָּן*, judge, has the connotations of *find guilty* or *vindicate*. Rashi, following the Midrash, takes the word here in both senses:]

He originally judged me and found me guilty [causing me to be barren; He judged me again] and vindicated me [and listened to my voice] (Rashi. Brackets are from the Midrash).

Thus, according to *Gur Aryeh's* interpretation of Rashi's exegesis, the connotation of *וַיִּשְׁמַע* is entirely positive: Although God had previously found me guilty as evidenced by my barren state, now He vindicated me and gave me children.

Be'er Yitzchak questions the above interpretations in the light of the superfluous *וְגַם*, and also, He suggests that Rashi's Midrashic exegesis takes *וַיִּשְׁמַע* here only in its

usual sense of *guilt*: וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים, God had judged me as guilty and made me barren; then subsequently — וְגַם, and also וַיִּשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי שָׁמָע, He listened to my voice and vindicated me. As a result, He has given me a son [through my maidservant] (Hirsch renders similarly).

וְגַם שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי — [And] He has also heard [in] my voice.

I.e., he accepted my prayer (see *Sforno* above).

[Literally: 'heard in my voice' — i.e., God heard the inner intent and the justice of my pleas (based on *Haamek Davar's* comment to *בְּקוֹלִי* in 21:12).]

Sforno interprets: God was righteous in his judgment by not granting me a child, וְגַם, but nevertheless, וַיִּשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי, He accepted my prayer.

וַיִּתֵּן לִי בֵן — And [He] has given me a son.

— One to whom I can be at least a spiritual mother. Although I am not his natural mother, I can care for him and raise him as my contribution to Jacob's family (R' Hirsch).

וַיִּתֵּן לִי בֵן — She therefore named him Dan.

[See footnote end of 29:32].

On the phrase *וַיִּתֵּן* signifying abundant progeny see Rashi to end of 29:34.

7. Naftali.

וַיִּתֵּן לָהּ בִּלְהָה שְׁפָחַת רָחֵל — And Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, bore.

Although Rachel freed her [v. 4], the Torah still refers to her as

ויצא
ל/ט

נִפְתּוּלֵי אֱלֹהִים | נִפְתַּלְתִּי עִם־אֲחָתִי גַם־
יִכְלָתִי וְתִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ נִפְתָּלִי: וְתֵרָא לָאָה ט
כִּי עֲמָדָה מְלֻדָּת וְתִקַּח אֶת־זִלְפָּה
שִׁפְחָתָהּ וְתִתֵּן אֹתָהּ לְיַעֲקֹב לְאִשָּׁה:

Rachel's maidservant to suggest that Bilhah continued to treat her still childless mistress with respect. She was unlike Hagar who, after having a child, began to hold her still childless mistress in low esteem (Haamek Davar).

8. נִפְתּוּלֵי אֱלֹהִים נִפְתַּלְתִּי עִם־אֲחָתִי –
Sacred schemes have I maneuvered to equal my sister.

The phrase is difficult and open to several interpretations. The translation attempts to reflect the sense of *Rashi's own* interpretation below.

Rashi first cites the view of the grammarian *Menachem ben Seruk* who explains *נִפְתּוּלֵי* as derived from the root *פתל* [meaning *bound together*] as in the phrase [*Numbers* 19:15]: *צִמֵּר פְּתִיל*, a cover tightly bound. Our verse would accordingly be rendered: *נִפְתּוּלֵי אֱלֹהִים*, [with] *Godly bonds* עִם־אֲחָתִי, *have I been bound with my sister* [Leah, i.e., put on an equal plane with her] to merit children [through Bilhah].

Rashi disagrees, and as reflected in our translation prefers to render it in the sense of *נִפְתָּלוּ* and *נִפְתָּלוּ*, *crooked and twisted* [Deut. 32:5], *Rachel's* intent being:

'I have attempted every possible scheme to influence God to grant me children as He did my sister' [Rachel prayed, blamed Jacob, sought to intimidate him with the threat of her literal or figurative 'death,' and finally gave him Bilhah.] She refers to these varying

attempts to influence God as 'schemes and maneuvers.'

Rashi goes on to cite the view of *Onkelos* who explains the term to mean *תפלה*, *prayer*, as if it read: *נִפְתּוּלֵי אֱלֹהִים*. *Onkelos* renders the sense of *Rachel's* declaration: God accepted my supplication when I prayed with desirable prayers that I have a child like my sister.

Rashi rejects both *Menachem's* and *Onkelos'* interpretations because according to *Menachem*, the phrase *and I prevailed* is superfluous, while according to *Onkelos*, one must rearrange the letters in *נִפְתּוּלֵי* to *נִפְתָּלוּ* for the purpose of interpretation, a practice *Rashi* prefers to avoid in elucidating the simple meaning of Scripture (*Tzeidah laDerech; Maskil l'David*).

Ibn Ezra also takes the word in the sense of *twisted* but with the connotation of *struggled, wrestled, contested*. He renders our verse: *With struggles to God have I struggled with my sister*. The reference to *God* suggests either that it was in honor of *God* that she gave her maidservant, or that *God* assisted her in her struggle.

Radak renders similarly but explains that *God* in this context is merely the Hebrew idiom for the superlative, the connotation being: *Enormous struggles*. When Scripture wishes to emphasize something's size or importance it idiomatically attaches *God's* Name to the noun, as in [*Jonah* 3:3]: *עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה לְאֱלֹהִים*, an enormously large [lit. large to God] city; [*Psalms* 36:7]: *הַרְרֵי־אֵל*, enormously high mountains [lit. mountains to God].

Abbarbanel renders: *Struggles, O God have I struggled*, etc.

A sacred 'wrestling competition' did I

'Sacred schemes have I maneuvered to equal my sister, and I have also prevailed!' And she named him Naftali.

9 When Leah saw that she had stopped giving birth she took Zilpah her maidservant and gave her to

wage with my sister: for the sacred privilege of having a share in building Jacob's family, I struggled to be on an equal footing with my sister (R' Hirsch).

Malbim, like Menachem cited above relates נפתלי to Numbers 19:15 נפתלי, tightly bound, but explains it to refer to matters that are shut off from human understanding: Divine mysteries. Thus, נפתלי אלהים, Divine secrets have been hidden from me אחותי עם, regarding my sister. — Why does she have children and not I?

Sforno renders: With Godly, sacred cleaving did I cleave to my husband עם אחותי, together with my sister, since we both gave Jacob our handmaids to facilitate the birth of the twelve sons whom Providence destined for him.

[According to Sforno, therefore, Leah had given Zilpah to Jacob before Naftali was born to Bilhah. His chronology is based on the tradition (Seder Olam; Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer) that eleven sons and Dinah were born during Jacob's second seven-year period of service. Accordingly, Sforno assumes that Leah gave her maidservant to Jacob before Naftali was born. Otherwise, if the sequence of the chapter is followed literally, there would be insufficient time — following Sforno's interpretation — for normal pregnancies. Such an interpretation presents no difficulty, since it is axiomatic that the Torah does not necessarily record events in sequential order. Cf. 'Jacob's Children' in comm. to v. 24.]

גם־נפתלי — And I have also prevailed.

— I.e. He has yielded to my importunities (Rashi) [by granting me a child through my maidservant.]

I have attained my intentions by giving my maidservant to my husband (Sforno).

R' Hirsch: I have been able to do it. By giving Bilhah to Jacob I have

come as close as possible to being the mother of part of Jacob's family.

According to Malbim, render: And I endured them [my predicament and lack of understanding] joyfully, for God is righteous.

וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ נַפְתָּלִי — And she named him Naftali.

[See footnote end of 29:32.]

9. Jacob marries Zilpah.

וַתֵּלֶךְ לֵאמֹר כִּי עָמְדָה מְלָכָה — When [lit. and] Leah saw that she had stopped giving birth [as noted in 29:35].

— And that in the interim Rachel had had two children by her maidservant (Alshich)...

וַתִּקַּח אֶת זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחָתָהּ — [And] she took Zilpah her maidservant.

Leah who had children of her own did not have Rachel's motive for giving her maid to Jacob, nor is it plausible for a woman to want her husband to take another wife. Therefore, we must conclude with the Midrash [see comm. to 29:34] that the Matriarchs were prophetesses who knew that Jacob was destined to have twelve sons. Leah gave Jacob her maidservant so the majority of the children would be from her and her maidservant who was subject to her. This was her implication further in verse 18 — that God had given her her reward because she gave her maidservant to Jacob [i.e., her willingness to endure the anguish of maintaining a rival wife in her

וַיֵּצֵא וְיָגֵד לֵאמֹר לֹאִה בְּגָד וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ גָּד: וַתֵּלֶד זֶלְפָּה שְׁפַחַת לֹאִה לְיַעֲקֹב בֶּן: יג קא גֵּד יב יא י

house earned her the merit of bearing another child.] Jacob also knew that he was destined to have twelve sons, and therefore he agreed to marry Zilpah.

... Furthermore, Jacob took many wives to increase his progeny because he was aware that the 'fourth generation' [see 15:16] had to return and take possession of the Promised Land. Therefore, Leah gave him her maidservant so that he would not wed a stranger (*Ramban*).

10. Gad.

Zilpah – וַתֵּלֶד זֶלְפָּה שְׁפַחַת לֹאִה, *Leah's maidservant bore*.

Of Zilpah, it does not say וַתֵּהָרֵם *and she conceived* [i.e. *became pregnant*] as it does of the others, because she was the youngest of them all – a mere child whose pregnancy was not noticeable. Laban had given her to Leah in order to further deceive Jacob into thinking that Leah was Rachel, the younger sister, as noted in the *comm.* to 29:24 (*Midrash; Rashi*).

I.e., because of her youth, the early months of her pregnancy were not recognizable through missed menstrual cycles, and it was not until her last months that she became obviously pregnant (*Yafeh Toar*). [Or because of her youth one would attribute her changed physiognomy not to *pregnancy*, but to weight gain, or other natural symptoms of developing maturity. Furthermore, pregnancy does not affect a vigorous young girl as it does an older woman.]

On her designation here as *maidservant* though she had been freed, see on v. 7.

[*To*] Jacob a son.

[See *Ramban* cited to this phrase in v. 5.]

11. בְּגָד – *Good luck has come!* [Hebrew: *bagad*, in assonance with the name Gad.]

I.e. an unexpected piece of luck has come. This son was one which Leah could not have expected under usual circumstances. Only Rachel's example had given Leah the idea of giving her maidservant to Jacob which led to the birth of Gad (*R' Hirsch*).

The translation follows *Rashi* who, following the *Mesorah*, treats בְּגָד as composed of two words: קא גֵּד. He cites the Talmudic meaning of גֵּד as *luck* [*Shabbos* 67b], and its use in *Isaiah* 65:11: לְגֵד, *for fortune*. [*Targum Yonasan, Rashbam, and Radak* render similarly.]

Rashi continues that the word has the Midrashic connotation of *cut down* (as in *Daniel* 4:11 גִּדֹּד), and implies that he *came* (i.e., was born) *already cut-down*, i.e., he was born circumcised.

According to the version in *Tanchuma* [*Noach* 5], seven major Scriptural figures were born already circumcised: Adam, Seth, Noah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Job. *Avos d'Rabbi Nosson* [ch. 2] lists: Job, Adam, Seth, Noah, Shem, Jacob, Moses, Balaam, Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Zerubabel. *Rashi's* exegesis which includes Gad in this category appears in *Midrash Aggadah*.

30 Jacob as a wife. ¹⁰ Zilpah, Leah's maidservant bore
10-13 Jacob a son. ¹¹ And Leah declared, 'Good luck has
 come!' So she named him Gad.

¹² Zilpah, Leah's maidservant bore a second son to
 Jacob. ¹³ Leah declared, 'In my good fortune! For
 women have deemed me fortunate!' So she named

Ibn Ezra also interprets בגד as composed of two words גַּד, just as בבל, *Babel*, is composed of בל, *confusion* has come [see 11:9 where בל is defined as a form of בלל. Cf. the word בָּנוּ = באנו, *we came*, in *I Sam.* 25:8].

However, *Ibn Ezra* interprets גַּד as derived from גָּדוּד, *troops*, our phrase accordingly meaning: *a troop has come*, i.e. now I have many children — a troop, as it were.

The traditional reading [k'ri] of the word is גַּד, *ba gad*. Thus it is interpreted as two words: גַּד, *gad* (luck or the other interpretations cited above) בָּא, *has come*, since in Scripture the primary interpretation of a word follows its reading. The traditional spelling [k'siv], however, is one word בגד, *bagad*=treachery, faithlessness.

-- *Rashi* concedes that he does not understand why the two words are traditionally spelled as one. However, he proceeds to cite an interpretation which accounts for the one-word written form: בגַּד, which means *faithless*: [Leah told Jacob], 'You have been faithless to me, the wife of your youth, by accepting my maidservant. [You should have refused her since I was already the mother of several children.]'

וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ גַּד — So [lit. and] she named him Gad.

[See footnote end of 29:32.]

12. Asher.

שִׁפְחַת לֵאָה — Leah's maidservant.

In contrast with Hagar, Zilpah continued to treat her mistress in a respectful manner. Thus, although

Leah had freed her and she had already borne a child, the Torah continues to refer to her as Leah's maidservant. As indicated above [30:4,7], Bilhah behaved similarly (*Haamek Davar*).

13. בְּאִשְׁרֵי כִּי אֲשֶׁרֻנִּי בְּנוֹת — In my good fortune! For women [lit. daughters] have deemed me fortunate.

I.e., this son represents another instance of the good fortune about which the women have been praising me (*Rashbam*; *Ibn Ezra*; *Sforno*).

Thus, the expression בְּאִשְׁרֵי should be interpreted in the same spirit as בְּגַד — in this case, בְּגַד אֲשֶׁרִי, *my good fortune has come* (*Yohel Or*).

Unlike Sarah or my sister, I did not have to bring a rival wife into my home. That I did so even though I had children of my own, is בְּאִשְׁרֵי, *to my great fortune*, since the women will praise me for it (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

R' Hirsch explains אֲשֶׁר in the sense of *progress* [see his *comm.* to אֲשֶׁרִי in *Psalms* 1:1]: Just as the births of my own children demonstrated my progress to personal happiness, so do the births of my ex-maidservant prove that I am still progressing toward that goal. The women have praised me for this progress as represented by the birth of these children.

Targum Yonasan perceives that this child will be praised in the

וַיֵּצֵא רְעִיבֵי יֵד וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ אֲשֶׁר: וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן בִּימֵי קְצִיר־חֹטִים וַיִּמְצָא דֹּדָאִים בַּשָּׂדֶה לֵיד

future for the good fruit which will grow in his portion of Eretz Yisrael [see 49:20].

וַתִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ אֲשֶׁר — So [lit. and] she named him Asher.

[See footnote end of 29:32.]

14. The dudaim.

The incident of the *dudaim* is one of the most puzzling in the Torah. It is filled with questions we cannot answer: What were the *dudaim*? Why were they so important to Rachel, Leah, and Reuben? Why did the Torah devote so many verses to an affair whose meaning eludes us?

It is clear beyond doubt that this chapter is filled with mysteries and secrets of the Torah. Of other verses, it is *axiomatic* that human intelligence is capable of only a superficial understanding of God's word; of the verses of the *dudaim*, it is *obvious* beyond doubt, for the Sages and commentators found many teachings in these cryptic verses.

Nevertheless, although we cannot comprehend them fully, we accept the privilege and responsibility of attempting to expound what we can, and acknowledge that the rest is a Divine mystery (*Sefer HaParshiyos*).

וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן בִּימֵי קְצִיר־חֹטִים — [And] Reuben went out in the days of the wheat harvest.

— In Sivan [late spring].

According to *Sforno*, Reuben *deliberately* went out in quest of the *dudaim* which were believed to have fertility-inducing powers (see below). He wanted them for his mother, Leah, because he perceived that she was grieving over the cessation of her childbearing activity [v. 9].

Perhaps Reuben had overheard the popular, but false notion, that the herb induced fertility, and so he went out in search for them (*Radak*).⁽¹⁾

The story of the *dudaim* is told in praise of Jacob's children. Although it was harvest time when mature wheat and barley were abundant, Reuben did not touch private property. Instead, he brought home only wild *dudaim* about which no one is concerned (*Midrash; Rashi*).

This lesson is further indicated by the fact that he found these *dudaim* בַּשָּׂדֶה, in the field, implying that they grew wild and were not taken from private property (*Malbim*).

וַיִּמְצָא דֹּדָאִים בַּשָּׂדֶה — [And] he found *dudaim* in the field.

[The Hebrew word *dudaim* refers to a fragrant plant (see *Song of Songs* 7:14) the exact identity of which is lost to us. Since a *definitive* translation of the term is impossible, we have merely *transliterated*, not translated the term.]

1. There are various chronologies regarding the birth of the tribes. According to *Midrash Lekach Tov*, followed by *Tzemach David* and *Shalshelos HaKabbalah*, Reuben found the flowers in Sivan 2197 when he was four years old.

[The above is certainly the prevailing Rabbinic view inasmuch as the Rabbinic chronologies agree that all of Jacob's children except Benjamin were born in the seven year period of servitude to Laban. Since Leah had two more children after this incident of the *dudaim*, Reuben could not have been more than five and a half years old at the time.]

¹⁴ Reuben went out in the days of the wheat harvest. He found *dudaim* in the field and brought

Rashi defines *dudaim* as a plant: סִיגְלִי [=violets (ויאורליש)] see Rashi to *Sanhedrin* 99b, and Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 216:8], which is called *jasmine* in Arabic.

[This follows the view of Levi in *Sanhedrin* 99b].

Ramban differs from Rashi's identification of the Rabbinic term סִיגְלִי (violets) with the Arabic *jasmine*. He maintains that *jasmine* is also the Rabbinic name for sesame seeds as mentioned in *Shabbos* 50b. It is quite distinct from סִיגְלִי (violets) mentioned in *Berachos* 43b, which is a fragrant herb for the smell of which one recites the blessing בּוֹרֵא עֶשְׂבֵי בִשְׁמִים ... who created fragrant herbs. Furthermore, the season of *jasmine* is not during the wheat harvest. With regard to the last objection, however, [Rashi would possibly maintain that] Reuben found them growing by chance, out of season.

Mizrachi attempts to defend Rashi's interpretation, claiming that some distinguish between the Arabic and Talmudic plants named *jasmine*. The Arabic *jasmine* is the Aramaic סִיגְלִי, *jasmine*, while the Talmudic *jasmine*, mentioned in *Shabbos* 50b, is a sesame ointment, as Rashi explains there. Further, Mizrachi suggests a possible scribal error in the text of Rashi. Accordingly, Rashi's comment should read not סִיגְלִי, but סִיגְלִי, which Rashi interprets as the Arabic *jasmine*.

[See *Berachos* 43b where these two terms are mentioned as different plants requiring different blessings. Rashi there interprets סִיגְלִי as *jasmine*, and סִיגְלִי as violets, an interpretation which is clearly at odds with our texts of Rashi in *Chumash* (the text upon which Ramban bases his comment) where Rashi interprets סִיגְלִי as *jasmine*.

The Gilyon HaShass in *Berachos* 43b takes note of this discrepancy. See *Sifsei Chachomim* to *Berachos* 43b, who cites the

Aruch where it is suggested that the Arabic designation *jasmine* on s.v. סִיגְלִי was originally a marginal note, not in Rashi's text. See also *Kaf HaChaim*, O. Ch. 216:8.

Furthermore, Rashi's primary comment in our verse that *dudaim* are סִיגְלִי, violets, follows, as noted, one view in *Sanhedrin* 99b. Thus, Mizrachi's textual emendation would negate this citation, and as Maharsha *ibid.* comments, such textual emendation would necessarily require other emendations throughout the *Talmud* itself, certainly an impractical solution. The difficulty remains unreconciled.]

Ramban proceeds to suggest that it is best to follow Onkelos who, as does R' Chiya in the *Midrash* translates *dudaim* as יְבֵרוּחִין [commonly, but only conjecturally defined as *mandrakes*, a plant that was reputed in Oriental lands to have magical powers. See below]. These are known as *yavruach* in Arabic. [The above also follows the primary view in *Sanhedrin* 99b.]

According to Ibn Ezra, who agrees with Onkelos' interpretation of יְבֵרוּחִין [mandrakes (?)], the species were very fragrant, as mentioned in *Song of Songs* 7:14. They resemble the human form, and some maintain that they are an aid to pregnancy, although Ibn Ezra questions their efficacy on medicinal grounds.^[1]

Ramban makes the same observation as Ibn Ezra and adds that if *dudaim* do indeed promote conception as some claim, it may be in the manner of a charm, not by its natural quality.

In any event, Ramban insists that

1. [However, the legends attributing magical properties to the plant identified by some as *mandrakes*, are widespread. Josephus in *Wars* 7:183 refers to a plant having medicinal properties which was uprooted by tying a dog to its roots. The animal pulling them out, im-

וַיָּבֵא אֹתָם אֶל-לֵאָה אִמּוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל
 אֶל-לֵאָה תִּנִּי-נָא לִי מְדוּדָי בִּנְךָ:
 וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הִמָּעַט קָחְתְּךָ אֶת-אִשְׁתִּי
 וּלְקַחַת גַּם אֶת-דְּוִדָּאִי בְנִי וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל

וַיָּבֵא
 ל/טו

Reuben brought only the fragrant fruit of the *dudaim*, not the stem which supposedly has these magical powers. No potion was involved. Rather, Rachel desired them only for the delight of their fragrance, for Rachel was blessed with children through prayer, not by medicinal methods.

It would accordingly seem that it is the Biblical intention to emphasize that *dudaim* do not possess these reputed powers, and that conception and childbirth are a Divine gift as is clearly set forth in verses 17 and 22 which mention God heeding their prayers. See *comm.* there (*Radak*).

[See below for two additional alternate interpretations offered by *Ramban*.]

Rashbam interprets *dudaim* in the sense of 'baskets of figs', citing *Song of Songs* 7:15.

[See *Rashi* there and *Eruvin* 21a quoting *Jeremiah* 24:1: And behold two *תַּאֲנִים* *דְּוִדָּאִים* has this meaning of baskets.]

Sforno, as noted, follows the interpretation that *dudaim* were fragrant herbs which promoted

conception.

וַיָּבֵא אֹתָם אֶל-לֵאָה אִמּוֹ — And [he] brought them to Leah his mother.

Although it is normal for young boys to bring found objects to their fathers as noted in *Bava Metzia* 12a, in this case the young Reuben displayed his discretion in realizing that this object would be more applicable to his mother. This incident is the derivation of the Talmudic description in *Gittin* 89b of a mature minor as one who attained *לְפָלְגוֹת*, the divisions of Reuben [see *Judges* 5:15], i.e., the age of discretion, personified by Reuben in this matter (*Haamek Davar*).

[It is *Radak* and *Sforno*'s view that Reuben did not merely 'happen' upon the *dudaim*. Accordingly, Reuben's judgment in this matter would be emphasized by his initial display of maturity in seeking the *dudaim* in response to his mother's desire to have more children. Selflessly suppressing the normal sibling unwillingness to share the parents' affection with new children, Reuben sought a way

mediately met a vicarious death for its master. *R' Yitzchak Caro*, grandfather of the author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, mentions this legend in *Toldos Yitzchak: Vayechi. Yerushalmi Shabbos* 6:2 forbids the recital of Biblical verses while uprooting the mandrake. *Rambam* in *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:29 mentions the 'superstitions of the deluded' about mandrakes.

Furthermore, *Karnei Or* cites *Rav Pe'alim* that *dudaim* provide a wonderful cure for weak eyesight, and its roots were a charm to facilitate pregnancy. Accordingly, he surmises that Leah and Rachel both were interested in these *dudaim* each for her own reason: Leah for her weak eyes, and Rachel for her barrenness.

Many in this context draw attention to the fact that the word *dudaim* is related to the word *dod*, love, recalling its purported aphrodisiac properties.

them to Leah his mother. Rachel said to Leah, 'Please give me some of your son's *dudaim*.' ¹⁵ But she said to her, 'Was your taking my husband insignificant? — And now to take even my son's *dudaim*!' Rachel

to help his mother conceive again. Or HaChaim notes that this same selflessness motivated him to relocate his father's bed in the incident related below in 35:22.]

The Midrash [which does not ascribe fertility powers to the *dudaim*] makes the observation that the young Reuben's respect for his mother was noteworthy. Although the fruit of *dudaim* are delectable, the youngster did not even taste any himself, but, as the verse attests, brought his mother whatever he found.

תְּנִינָא לִי מִדּוּרְאֵי בְנִי — Please give me [some] of your son's *dudaim*.

Not all of the *dudaim*, as it is rude to request all that another has; Rachel asked for only some of them (Haamek Davar).

Possibly she wanted to perfume Jacob's couch in the customary manner [see Proverbs 7:17] ... or as some say *dudaim*, which is derived from the word *dodim* [love], are herbs which act as a stimulant to the husband (Ramban v. 15).

[Why didn't Rachel avoid this whole conflict and pick her own *dudaim*?

— Perhaps these flowers were not common or easily accessible, and it was immodest for a woman to go out in the fields alone.]

15. הִמָּצֵט קֶחֶךְךָ אֶת־אִשִּׁי — Was your taking of my husband insignificant?

— I.e. that you act in a manner that would make it appear that you are the wife and I the handmaid? (Ramban).

— 'Are you not satisfied with attracting my husband's affection toward yourself?' Leah alluded to the fact noted by the Sages that Jacob's primary residence was with Rachel notwithstanding Leah's many children (*Shocher Tov*).¹¹

[He was my husband before he was yours. Once I was already married to him] you should never have consented to become my rival-wife (*Sforno*).

וְנִי לָקַחְתָּ גַם אֶת־דּוּרְאֵי בְנִי — And now to take even my son's *dudaim*! [lit. and to take also my son's *dudaim*].

— As though you were in fact my mistress? (Ramban).

[And by your use of its aphrodisiac qualities] you would also increase his love for you and hatred for me (*Sforno*).

The rendering of this elliptic phrase as an incredulous question follows Rashi who accounts also for the infinitive form לָקַחְתָּ, to take, rather than the second person feminine תִּקְחִי, you would take: Is it a small thing that you took my husband ... would you also

1. Midrash Aggadah renders the implication similarly and provides Rachel's response to Leah's accusation: 'He is not your destined husband but mine, for it was only for my sake that he came here from Beer Sheba. Only because I told you pre-arranged signs [see on 29:25] did he become your husband at all. Nevertheless ... he shall lie with you tonight in return for your son's *dudaim*.'

ויצא ל/טו
לכן ישכב עמך הלילה תחת דודאי בנך:
ויבא יעקב מן השדה בערב ותמצא לאה טו
לקראתו ותאמר אלי תבוא בי שכר
שכרתך בדודאי בני וישכב עמה

seek לקחת, to take my son's *dudaim*?
[Cf. *Targum Yonasan*.]

ותאמר רחל לכן ישכב עמך הלילה תחת
דודאי בנך — [And] *Rachel said*,
'Therefore, [i.e., to allay your suspi-
cions] he shall lie with you tonight
in return for your son's *dudaim*.'¹¹

Jacob was to have stayed that
night with Rachel but she ceded the
privilege to Leah in exchange for the
dudaim. Because Rachel made light
of being with that righteous man
she was not privileged to be buried
[i.e. to lie in eternal repose] with
him (*Rashi*).

[It would appear that *Rashi* cites
this *Midrashic* interpretation to em-
phasize one of the several underly-
ing reasons why this seemingly un-
important incident was recorded in
the Torah.]

In 49:8, *Rashi* seems to contradict
himself. There he explains that Rachel
was buried by the roadside where her
descendants were destined to trudge
away to Babylonian exile after the
Destruction. When they passed her
tomb, her soul would beseech God for
mercy upon them, and He would re-
spond with the reassurance that they
would one day return to their land. If
so, her failure to be buried in the Cave
of Machpelah with Jacob was not a
punishment but a Divine manifestation
of mercy for the future exiles.

The commentators explain that

Rashi's two comments are not con-
tradictory but complementary. It is true
that the choice of her resting place in
Bethlehem was for the sake of prayers
for Israel, but had she not belittled the
company of the *tzaddik*, she would
have had the even greater privilege of
being buried with him. [In that case,
God would have provided another
source of mercy for the exiles.] Further-
more, since it would have been demean-
ing for Jacob to have been buried with
two sisters since the Torah would later
forbid such marriages, the choice of
which one would be buried with him
was decided by individual merit. Thus,
it was Rachel's making light of Jacob's
companionship that determined that it
would be *she* who would be destined to
forfeit the privilege of being buried near
Jacob in the Cave of Machpelah, and
not Leah [see *Overview*] (*Mizrachi*; *Gur
Aryeh*).

Radak is of the opinion that
Jacob had made his primary
residence with Rachel in the hope
that she would be blessed with con-
ception by his constant presence.
Each time they were together Rachel
prayed that it would lead to
pregnancy, as did Leah. Therefore,
when they both finally conceived
the Torah says of each that her
prayers were responsible; of Leah
[v. 17]: *God heeded Leah's* [prayer];
and of Rachel [v. 22]: *God heeded
her*.

1. That night was the sixth of Sivan (*Shavuot*) the day on which the Torah would later be
given at Sinai. The Patriarchs were very aware that the child who would be conceived on that
propitious night would merit to spend his life immersed in Torah study. Leah was eager to
merit such a child and Rachel — as usual — capitulated to her older sister's request.

Issachar was the product of this union [see footnote to v. 18] (*Alshich*).

said, 'Therefore, he shall lie with you tonight in return for your son's *dudaim*.'

¹⁶ When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, 'It is to me that you must come for I have clearly hired you with my

16. וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב מִן הַשָּׂדֶה בְּעֶרְבַּי — When [lit. and] Jacob came from the field in the evening.

The Midrash notes how dedicated a worker Jacob was even during this second seven-year period when he had already married both Rachel and Leah. He did not return from the field until evening, in observance of the law obliging a day laborer to work until darkness sets in.

It was his custom to eat his evening meal in the tent of the wife with whom he was to spend that particular night. As noted, however, his primary residence was with Rachel (Abarbanel; Akeidas Yitzchak).

וַיֵּצֵא לֵאָה לִקְרָאָתוֹ — And Leah went out to meet [lit. toward] him.

The Sages viewed Leah's going out unfavorably, as an immodest act. The Midrash gives Leah the uncompimentary designation of וְצִיִּינִי, 'one who is fond of going out.' See Rashi to 34:1.

Nevertheless, the Zohar, Radak and most commentators in the simple sense, defend Leah's action in going out to meet Jacob. Since Jacob had no idea of what had transpired he intended to go to his primary residence in Rachel's tent [see Radak above and Rashi to 35:22], where he was to have spent that night. It was certainly more delicate for her to go out and intercept him, before he entered Rachel's tent rather than force Rachel to endure

the embarrassment of informing Jacob that she had given up his company for the sake of a few *dudaim*.

Furthermore, Leah was apprehensive that Rachel might seek to postpone fulfillment of her promise to another night since she had not said [ט. 15] הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה, *this very night*, but the less specific *the night* (Or HaChaim).

וְאֵלַי תָּבוֹא — It is to me that you must come.

I.e. it is to my tent that you must come, since each of the wives had her own tent (Radak; Abarbanel; see HaKsav V'HaKabbalah; Sforno; Eruvin 100b).

בִּי שָׂכַר שְׂכָרְתִּיךָ בְּדוּדָאֵי בְנִי — For I have clearly hired you [lit. hire have I hired you (the compound infinitive verb idiomatically denotes a forceful emphasis)] with my son's *dudaim*.

I.e., [In order to have you spend the night in my tent], I have paid Rachel the hire she demanded for you (Rashi).

Rashi makes this comment so that one is not led to incorrectly interpret שְׂכָרְתִּיךָ, *I have hired you*, in the sense that I have received a fee for hiring you out (Mizrachi).

'For I have hired you with my son's *dudaim* — and your visit will not deprive Rachel of her rights, because the arrangement was made with her consent.' To those who brazenly misinterpret the Torah, this incident may appear immodest. Its purpose is to emphasize that the Patriarchs viewed marital intimacy with an innocence

וַיִּצָא י' בְּלִילָה הוּא: וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל-לֵאָה
 לַיִּל י" וַתֵּהָר וַתֵּלֶד לְיַעֲקֹב בֶּן חֲמִישִׁי: וַתֹּאמֶר
 לֵאָה נָתַן אֱלֹהִים שְׂכָרִי אֲשֶׁר-נָתַתִּי
 שְׂפָחָתִי לְאִישִׁי וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יִשְׂשָׁכָר:

similar to that of Adam and Eve prior to their sin: There was no thought of physical gratification; they were solely motivated by the desire to bear children and produce offspring to serve God. Furthermore, the incident demonstrates the favor with which God looked upon the deeds and pure intentions of the Matriarchs. Their sole motive was to share in the building of Israel; to do so they sought every *natural* avenue, such as asking Jacob to take other wives, and seeking the properties of the *dudaim*. Therefore, God accepted their prayers for it is proper for the *tzaddik* to combine effort and prayer (*Sforno*).

[The assonance of *sachor secharticha* is alluded to in the name given to the offspring of this union: Issachar.]

So [lit. and] he lay with her that night [he].

The word *הוא*, at the end of the phrase intimates: with his full consent and desire, fully cognizant of her pure and lofty motives (*Sforno*; *Or HaChaim*).

Radak notes that although it is uncommon for the definite article *ה* [בְּלִילָה הוּא] to be omitted, it is nevertheless an acceptable form. Compare, for example *II Samuel* 6:3: אֶת הָעֶגְלָה (הַחֲדָשָׁה) [הַחֲדָשָׁה] חֲדָשָׁה; *Numbers* 28 אָחַד [=הָאֶחָד].

[However, the Sages perceived a deeper connotation here. According to the *Talmud* (*Niddah* 31a) the use of the anomalous form *הוא*, *he*, instead of the regular *ההוא* refers to God, the *He* par excellence]:

It teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, sent His assistance: with His help Issachar was born

(*Rashi*) [Comp. similar interpretation of *הוא*, *He*, in 19:33.]

The *Talmud* goes on to explain that God 'assisted' in the matter by initially inspiring the donkey Jacob had been riding upon, to head toward Leah's tent, where she intercepted him. The Sages cite Jacob's later blessing to Issachar: יִשְׂשָׁכָר חֲמֹר נָכֵם [familiar interpretation: *Issachar is a strong-boned donkey*] which the Sages perceive in this context to imply: *As for Issachar, a donkey was instrumental* [נָכֵם lit. *was the cause*].

Nachalas Yitzchak adds that the 'assistance' was that God caused the donkey to *bray* loudly as it neared Leah's tent so she would be aware that Jacob was approaching and go out to meet him. Nevertheless, he feels that *Rashi's* primary implication of God's assistance was that He ensured that Leah would conceive from that night's intimacy and beget Issachar.

17. Issachar.

[And] God hearkened to Leah.

I.e., He received her constant prayers for another child (*Targumim*; *Radak*).

She had eagerly desired, and sought means, to increase the number of the tribes (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

— This specifically dispels any notion regarding the efficacy of *dudaim* in promoting fertility. The verse specifically teaches us that it was because *God hearkened to Leah* that she conceived and bore this child. Children are a gift of God (*Radak*; *R' Chananel*).

30 son's *dudaim*.¹⁷ So he lay with her that night.
17-18 ¹⁷ God hearkened to Leah. She conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸ And Leah declared, 'God has granted me my reward because I gave my maid-servant to my husband.' So she named him Issachar.

Or HaChaim adds that the further implication is that God recognized the pure motivation of Leah's ostensibly improper behavior. In her overpowering love of God and His commandments, she overstepped the bounds of propriety and lowered herself by inviting Jacob to her tent. Measure for measure, God rewarded her love by giving her two sons more than she normally would have had.

וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד לַיַּעֲקֹב בֶּן חַמִּישִׁי — And she conceived and bore [to] Jacob a fifth son.

[I.e. his fifth son from her; in total this was his ninth son.]

Whenever the terms וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד, conceived and bore appear together, they imply painless childbirth: just as the conception was painless, so was the birth (*Tanchuma*; cf. *Sotah* 12a).

[On the expression לַיַּעֲקֹב, to Jacob, see Ramban cited in v. 5.]

18. וַתֵּן אֱלֹהִים שְׂכָרִי אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי — God has granted me my reward [Hebrew: *sachar*] because [lit. that] I gave my maid-servant to my husband.

Her willingness to endure a rival in her home proved her selflessness in wanting to foster the birth of the tribes. Now she interpreted God's gift of another child to her as a reward for her virtuous deed (*R'Avraham ben HaRambam*; *Ralbag*; see Ramban to v. 9).¹¹

יִשָּׁשָׁכָר — Issachar [= Yissachar].

I.e., יֵשׁ שָׂכָר (*yesh sachar*) there is reward for my good deed (*Radak*).

[The two letters ש intimate] a double *sachar*. [The word *sachar* means reward as well as hire]: one, referring to the hiring out of the *dudaim*, and one referring to her reward for giving up her handmaid to her husband (*Rashbam*).

❖ The pronunciation of Yissachar.

As noted, One of the 'rewards' (*sachar*) alluded to by the double ש in Issachar refers to her statement I have clearly 'hired' [*sachor sechar-ticha*] you. Since this has an uncomplimentary connotation, one ש is silent and not pronounced. [Thus the name is pronounced Yissachar and not, as written Yissas'char] (*Daas Zekeinim*; *Chizkuni*; *Baal HaTurim*).

1. The *Midrash* observes that as a result of this incident of the *dudaim* there arose two great tribes in Israel: Issachar and Zevulun.

Issachar engaged in Torah study while Zevulun went to sea and shared his profits with him; thus did Torah knowledge increase in Israel. [On this Issachar-Zevulun partnership of Torah-study and commerce, see *comm.* to 49:13-14 and *Deut.* 33:18.]

The *Zohar* similarly notes that the *dudaim* did not make Rachel bear children, but God used them as an instrument to cause Rachel — who had always clung to Jacob — to release him to Leah that night. The result of this *dudaim* exchange was the birth of Issachar who clung to the Torah more than all the other tribes, and through whom the fragrance of the Torah ascended to the Almighty, in harmony with the allusion in *Song of Songs* 7:14: *The dudaim give forth fragrance.*

וַיֵּצֵא יְהוָה עוֹל לֵאָה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן-שָׁשִׁי לַיֶּעֱקֹב:
 לְיִטְכָּא כ וַתֵּאֱמַר לֵאָה זָכְרָנִי אֱלֹהִים | אֲתִי זָכָר
 טוֹב הַפֶּעַם יוֹכֵלֵנִי אִישִׁי כִּי-יִלְדָתִי לוֹ
 שָׂשָׂה בָנִים וַתִּקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ זָכָלֹן:
 כא וְאַחֵר יִלְדָה בֵּת וַתִּקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמָהּ דִּינָה:

Why then did Leah give her child a name with a double *sh* to commemorate both of these incidents, including the uncomplimentary one of 'hiring' him?

— She knew how lofty her motives were, and she had no cause for shame; therefore, she had no hesitation in giving the name. Others, however, might misinterpret her motivations and read an indecent connotation into her remark. Therefore, the other *sh* is not pronounced (*Yalkut Yehudah*).

Another reason advanced for the silent *sh* is that Issachar had a son named יוֹב, *Yov* [46:13] which Issachar later realized to be a disgraceful name [inasmuch as it was the name of a heathen god (*Devek Tov* to *Numbers* 26:24).] Issachar thereupon gave him a letter (*sh*) of his name, and renamed him יָשׁוּב, *Yashuv* [see genealogy in *Numbers* *ibid*]. Hence Issachar's name is pronounced as if it were spelled with one *sh*: יִשְׁכָּר (*Daas Zekeinim*).

Ibn Ezra to *Exodus* 1:3 defends this pronunciation grammatically by stating that since the two consonants follow one another, the second is silent, as in the word מְחַצְצִים in *1 Chron.* 15:24 which is pronounced מְחַצְרִים. This is the only other such case in Scripture.

[There are various customs regarding this matter. Some pronounce the name fully the first time it appears in the *Torah*, and in subsequent passages pronounce it *Yissachar*. Others — and this is the prevailing custom — always pronounce it *Yissachar*. *Torah Sheleimah* 863 discusses this at length and cites a custom whereby some pronounce it fully until *Numbers* 26:24 where the name *Yashuv* appears the first time, and then only *Yissachar*.]

19-20. Zevulun.

וְזָכְרָנִי אֱלֹהִים אֲתִי זָכָר טוֹב — *God has endowed me [with] a good endowment.*

God was generous to me because my intentions in the matter of the *dudaim* were lofty; I acted only for His honor (*Sforno*).

— And his descendants, too, will receive a good portion in *Eretz Yisrael* (*Targum Yonasan*).

The translation a good endowment [lit. a good portion] follows *Onkelos* cited by *Rashi*; and *Rashbam* who deduces this meaning from the context.

Ramban notes that there is no Hebrew source known for the word זָכָר. He treats the word as a composite of the two words זָרַח, *this is a tree-branch* for me. She figuratively describes the child as the branch of her family-tree. *Ramban* cites similar usages in *Job* 18:13; *Isaiah* 16:6, where זָרַח similarly refers to children. She calls the child good because 'he will be the cause of my husband dwelling with me permanently.'

Regarding *Targum's* translation of זָכָר as a portion, *Ramban* observes that *Targum* treats the word as if it were spelled with a *ra*, זָרַח, which is Aramaic for צִידָה, provisions [see 42:25]. *Targum's* intent is that God made this son like a generous store of provisions, assuring her of happiness and security, because now that she had given

¹⁹ Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. ²⁰ Leah said, 'God has endowed me with a good endowment. Now my husband will make his permanent home with me for I have borne him six sons.' So she named him Zebulun. ²¹ Afterwards, she bore a daughter and she named her Dinah.

birth to half of his ordained number of sons, Jacob would live mainly with her.

Hoffmann perceives the word זָבַל to be related to זָבַל, both verb forms having the essential meaning of exalted [usually in connection with abode]. The substance of Leah's declaration was: 'God exalted me with this good endowment. Therefore my husband, too, will exalt me and consider me his primary wife.'

הַפֶּעַם יִזְבְּלֵנִי אִישִׁי בִּי יִלְדְתִי לוֹ שֵׁשׁ בָּנִים — Now [i.e., henceforth (see Rashi to same word in 29:34)] my husband will make his permanent home with me [Hebrew: Yizbeleni, in assonance with Zebulun] for I have borne him six sons.

Now that I have presented him with as many children as the rest of his wives together, his primary residence will be with me. The word יִזְבְּלֵנִי [denoting dwelling-place] is related to the phrase בֵּית זָבַל a house for dwelling in 1 Kings 8:13 (Rashi).

Hence, I will provide him with his lofty abode, and his love for me will ever increase (Radak).

[See Hoffmann above who renders: now my husband will exalt me...]

According to Malbim: now my husband will take me into his tent because I have borne him six sons and I have outgrown my premises.

21. Dinah.

וְאַחֵר יָלְדָה בָּת — [And] afterwards, she bore a daughter.

The Torah, as noted often in this commentary, is not merely a history book, and does not generally mention the birth of a daughter. Dinah's birth is mentioned because she plays an important role later on in the narrative [see chapt. 34] and the Torah now introduces her to us (Hoffmann).

It would appear that Dinah was Zebulun's twin because the Torah simply states: *Afterwards she bore a daughter*, without mentioning that she conceived again (Ibn Ezra; Radak; Chizkuni).

[According to the Rabbinic interpretation cited by Rashi below, it might be possible that the Torah did not tell us that she conceived and bore a daughter because in fact she did not conceive a daughter: she conceived a son and later bore a daughter. (I later saw this interpretation in Haamek Davar and Torah Temimah). Furthermore, the Talmud's interpretation is attached to the word אַחֵר, afterward, i.e. after she passed judgment on herself she bore a daughter, not after the birth of Zebulun. The matter of conception is irrelevant to the point made by the verse. See further.]

וַתִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמָהּ דִּינָה — And [she] named her Dinah.

No reason for this name is given in the Torah. Targum Yonasan supplies it: For she said: 'Judgment [דִּין] proceeds from God that there shall be from me [only] half the tribes.'

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־רָחֵל וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהֶיהָ
 לִכְבוֹדָהּ בִּג אֱלֹהִים וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת־רַחֲמָהּ: וַתֵּהָר וַתֵּלֶד
 בֶּן וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְף אֱלֹהִים אֶת־חַרְפָּתִי:

Rashi [citing *Berachos* 60a] comments that Leah 'passed judgment' (*danah*): '[Jacob is destined to beget twelve tribes. I have already borne six and each of the handmaids have already borne two, making a total of ten.] If the child I am carrying turns out to be a male, then Rachel will not even be equivalent to one of the handmaids.' She therefore prayed concerning him, and he was changed to a female. [The bracketed addition is from the *Talmud*, *ibid.*]^[1]

[The Midrashic version of Dinah's birth is different. According to the *Midrash*, the cause of Dinah's birth as a female was Rachel's prayer after the birth of Joseph that she be granted another son [v. 24]. (*Maharzu* notes accordingly, that although the Torah groups all of Leah's later children together, Dinah was born after Joseph [see chart end of v. 24]).]^[2]

22. Rachel conceives; the birth of Joseph.

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־רָחֵל
 remembered Rachel.

[As fully explained in the commentary to the parallel expression regarding Noah above, 8:1 (pages

260-261) since there is no forgetfulness before God the term 'remembering' when applied to Him is a human term describing the manifestation of His benevolence on earth. According to *Rashi* following the *Midrash* the term *remember* implies that He took cognizance of some virtuous act. Hence *Rashi's* comment here]:

He took cognizance of Rachel's self sacrifice in having transmitted the secret sign to Leah [see 29:25]; He also remembered Rachel's recurring fear that Jacob might divorce her on account of her barrenness and that she would then have to marry Esau. Indeed Esau had entertained this hope when he heard Rachel was childless.

According to *Sforno*, God 'remembered' her efforts in bringing her handmaid into her house, and the incident of the *dudaim*.

Cf. *Ramban* to 21:1 [p. 744] who notes that 'remembering' is used in reference to all barren women who later gave birth, as in the case of Hannah [*I Sam.* 1:19]. See also footnote there on the terms זָכַר and פָּקִידָה.

1. The *Talmud* adds that God's response to Leah's prayer was a miracle. Therefore, it does not contradict the *Mishnah's* (*ibid.* 54a) rule that it is vain for a man to pray that his already pregnant wife should give birth to a male. Alternatively, Leah's prayer might have occurred within the first forty days after conception when the embryo's sex is considered as yet undetermined; then it is indeed proper to pray for a male child [see *Mizrachi*].

Cf. *Divrei David* who suggests that the *Mishnah's* rule applies only to a case where one prays that his wife bear a male, for how can the female she is carrying be born a male? However, when one specifically prays for God's intervention to change the sex of the embryo then it is not a vain prayer, for nothing is beyond God.

2. Our version in the *Midrash* records that Dinah's name commemorates how all the Matriarchs assembled and prayed: 'We have sufficient [*dayeinu*] males, let Rachel be remembered!'

30 ²² God remembered Rachel. God hearkened to her
22-23 and He opened her womb. ²³ She conceived and bore
a son, and said, 'God has taken away my disgrace.'

According to *Rosh Hashanah* 11a, the use of the term *remembrance* suggests that this event occurred on Rosh HaShanah, the day of 'remembrance of the *teruah*.'

Rosh HaShanah is the day God 'remembers' His people, and it was on this day that Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah were remembered (*Tanchuma*; *Midrash*).

[On the use here of the Name *Elohim* which describes God as Dispenser of Justice instead of the more appropriate Name *HASHEM* which designates Him as a Merciful God, see *Rashi* and footnote to 8:1: 'Happy are the righteous who transform the Attribute of Justice into the Attribute of Mercy' for even as God (*Elohim*) — Dispenser of Strict Justice — He compassionately remembered Rachel.]

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים — [And] God hearkened to her.

— I.e. received her prayers (*Targum*).

As *Ramban* in v. 2 observes, when Rachel saw that she could not rely on Jacob's prayer, she proceeded to pray on her own behalf.

— These prayers were now answered, after Rachel had done

everything in her power to bear children (*Alshich*).

וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת רִחְמָהּ — And He opened her womb.^[1]

[It was not the reputed fertility powers of the *dudaim* that resulted in Rachel's womb being opened. As emphasized in the commentary to v. 14, this verse makes clear that God remembered Rachel; God hearkened to her prayers; and it was He — Alone — Who opened her womb. Children are clearly a gift of God.]

23. אָסַף אֱלֹהִים אֶת חַרְפִּי — God has taken away [Hebrew: *asaph*, in assonance with *Yosef*, Joseph] my disgrace.

I.e. my disgrace as a barren woman. I had become an object of reproach for people were saying that I would eventually become Esau's wife [and now there was no further danger of that happening] (*Tanchuma*; *Rashi*).^[2]

— My disgrace in that people used to reproach me, saying: Were Rachel really pious, she would have borne children (*Midrash HaGadol*).

According to *Sforno*, the disgrace

1. The *Talmud* (*Taanis* 2b) notes that the Holy One, Blessed be He, retains control of three 'keys' and does not entrust them to agents: The keys of rain, childbearing, and sustenance. Our verse [which unlike the earlier reference in 29:31 contains the words וַיִּפְתַּח אֱלֹהִים, God opened, in uninterrupted sequence (*Maharsha*)] is cited in the case of childbearing. [Cf. version in *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* cited on p. 744.]

2. *Rashi* also cites the Midrashic interpretation that God has taken away my disgrace by providing Rachel with a child to blame for her faults:

Before a woman has a child she has no one on whom to blame her faults. When, however, she has a child, she puts it on him:

'Who broke this article?' — 'Your son!'

'Who ate these figs?' — 'Your son!'

[*Harav Gedalia Schorr* זצ"ל has explained this apparently banal expression of gratitude at having a child. Rachel meant to say that God's blessing was utterly complete. So complete was it that it extended from the loftiest spheres down to the most trivial — such as providing an excuse for mishaps at home.]

וַיֵּצֵא כֹד וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר יִסַּף יְהוָה
לְכַדְכָּה כֹה לִי בֶן אַחֵר: וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה רָחֵל אֶת־
יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־לְבָן שְׁלַחֲנִי

was that God had accepted Leah's prayers and not hers.

The mockers of that generation would taunt Rachel by saying that Jacob gave the beautiful Rachel a potion to keep her from childbearing for he desired her only as a mistress. It was the custom in those times for some men to marry two women: one for children and the other, who would be sterilized, for beauty [see *comm.* to 4:19]. To be considered a living ornament is a disgrace to a woman; with the birth of her child, Rachel was finally vindicated (*HaKsav V'HaKaballah* citing R' Y. Caro).

She prophetically added: As my son has removed my disgrace, so Joshua, his descendant, will remove the 'disgrace' from the children of Israel when he circumcises them beyond the Jordan River before they enter the Holy Land [see *Joshua* 5:9] (*Targum Yonasan*).

The translation of אָסַף as *taken away* — in the sense of *laid it up somewhere out of sight* follows *Rashi* who cites this meaning of the verb in *Isaiah* 4:1; *Exod.* 9:9; *Joel* 4:13; and *Isaiah* 60:20.

Ibn Ezra interprets it in the sense of *vanish* as in *Isaiah* 16:10: Joy and gladness will vanish (וַיִּמָּחֶה).

Ramban agrees with *Onkelos* that the verb אָסַף should be understood in its plain sense: *gathered*. In our context the phrase would mean that God has *gathered up* her disgrace, i.e., she would no longer be discussed publicly.

Of course, the verb cannot be understood

simply in its literal sense as *gathered up*, with the connotation of piling up in one place for all to see. That is why *Rashi* qualified his interpretation by adding: *laid it up somewhere out of sight* (*Mizrachi*).

24. יוֹסֵף — Joseph.

— Hebrew: *Yosef*. The name thus contains allusions both to the past: *God has taken away* [*asaf*] *my disgrace*, coupled with Rachel's prayer for the future: *May HASHEM add on* [*yosef*] *another son* (*Rashbam*; *Radak*).

— *Saying* [i.e. as if to imply], *'May HASHEM add on* [Hebrew: *yosef*] *for me another son*.

— [Here she invokes God in His Aspect as *HASHEM* — Dispenser of *Mercy*.]

She asked for only *one* more son because she knew prophetically that Jacob would have twelve sons, and eleven of them were already born.] The intent, then, of her prayer was: *May that son which Jacob is yet destined to bear issue from me* (*Rashi*).⁽¹⁾

Following the *Midrash* cited above [end of v. 21], Joseph was born while Leah was pregnant with a male embryo. As a result of Rachel's prayer, the embryo was transformed into Dinah.

1. The word *Yosef* means 'increase'. Prophetess that she was, Rachel foresaw that she would have a second son. But an increase added on by God is usually larger than the original itself. Thus, Benjamin, the second son, whom Rachel regarded merely as a supplement, had ten sons while Joseph begot only two. These twelve together may be regarded the twelve tribes borne by Rachel (*Tanchuma Yashan*).

According to *Yelamdeinu* # 20, Rachel prophesied that Joseph would be the ancestor of the *Messiah ben Joseph* who would arise at the 'end of days'. Thus, בֶּן אַחֵר, *another son*, is to be understood as an eschatological reference to the עוֹלָם שֶׁל אַחֲרָיו, one who would function at the end of world history.

30 ²⁴ So she named him Joseph saying, 'May HASHEM
24-25 add on for me another son.'

²⁵ And it was, when Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, 'Grant me leave that I

☞ Jacob's Children.

Ibn Ezra appends a note that except for Benjamin all of the tribes — and Dinah as well — were born in the seven year period. The assumption then is that they were born barely seven months apart [total 7 years = 84 months ÷ 12 children = 7 months each.] If so, the Text is probably not in strict chronological sequence: Leah may have given her handmaid Zilpah to Jacob before Naftali was born, and Rachel conceived before Zebulun was born. In any event we are not told when Dinah was born.

[Summing up, quite probably only Leah's first four children were born seven months apart; Jacob may have married the handmaids while Leah was pregnant with other children and each of them carried a full nine month period. See *Seder Olam* chapter 2; *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* chapter 36; *Ibn Ezra* to *Exod.* 2:2.]

The following table lists Jacob's children born in that period:

[The overlapping sequence is conjectural]

1	Reuben	
2	Simeon	
3	Levi	
4	Yehuda	
5	Naftali	Gad
6	Zebulun	Joseph
7	Dinah	

[There is, furthermore, an opinion recorded in *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* that each of the children except Joseph was born with a twin sister. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 82:8, 84:21. *Tosafos Bava Basra* 123a records that the sons intermarried with daughters of the other wives (i.e. with their half-sisters from their fathers, which was permitted Noachides, and which was not prohibited until the giving of the Torah — see *Ramban* cited in *comm.* to 37:35 and 38:2 for a full discussion of this opinion). Dinah, however, who according to this view, was not born with a twin, did not marry any of her half-brothers, and as we shall see Joseph later married Asenath who our Sages teach was Dinah's daughter by Shechem (see 41:45). Cf. also the Midrashic view in 34:26 and 46:10 that Simeon married Dinah.]

25. Jacob wishes to depart. A new agreement is concluded with Laban.

וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה רָחֵל אֶת יוֹסֵף — And it was, when Rachel had given birth to Joseph.

By this time the additional seven years of service for Rachel had ended (*Rashbam*).

It will be recalled that when Jacob fled from Esau his mother promised to send for him when she perceived that the threat from Esau had subsided. Actually, we find no specific reference in the text of Jacob having received such a call [aside from the Midrashic tradition cited by *Rashi* in 35:8 that Rebecca had sent her nurse Deborah for the purpose of summoning Jacob.]¹¹ Possibly Jacob felt that now that his beloved

1. At this time, Jacob was 91 years old. Isaac was 151, and Rebecca was 114.

Sefer HaYashar holds that it was at this time that Rebecca sent her nurse Deborah and two

וַיֵּצֵא לְכוּכוֹ 70 וְאֶלְכָה אֶל־מְקוֹמִי וְלֹאֲרָצִי: תָּנָה אֶת־
נָשִׁי וְאֶת־יְלָדֵי אֲשֶׁר עִבְדָּתִי אֶתָּה בְּהֵן
וְאֶלְכָה בִּי אֶתָּה יָדַעַת אֶת־עִבְדָּתִי אֲשֶׁר
בִּי עִבְדָּתִיהָ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לָכֵן אִם־נָא
מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ נִחְשָׁתִי וַיְבָרְכֵנִי יְהוָה

wife had borne a child, it was a propitious sign that he return home though his mother's call had not yet come (*Hoffmann*).

According to the *Midrash*, [although Jacob's period of service had ended and he was theoretically free to leave at any time] Jacob waited specifically until Joseph was born because it was only after the birth of Joseph, whom Jacob prophetically foresaw to be Esau's conqueror, that Jacob felt he could safely return home and brave Esau's wrath.

As *Rashi* expresses it: *When Rachel had given birth to Joseph — who was the [destined] adversary of Esau [i.e., the power that would defeat him], as it is written [Obadiah v. 18]: And the House of Jacob shall be fire, and the House of Joseph flame, and the House of Esau shall be straw. Fire [=Jacob] without a flame [=Joseph] is ineffective from afar [i.e. only with the birth of Joseph who was like a flame could Jacob hope to defeat Esau.] Accordingly, only when Joseph was born did Jacob place his trust in God and decide to return home. [Cf. Bava Basra 123b.]*

Radak suggests that Jacob waited until Rachel gave birth so that Laban could not ask him to leave her behind because she was childless [in which case Laban

would then marry her to someone else (*Haamek Davar*).]

Jacob knew that he would have twelve tribes [as evidenced by the coalesced stones in 28:11]. Accordingly, once Rachel had borne Joseph and had been assured another son [v. 24], he was unafraid of Esau because Providence would surely keep him alive at least until he begot the twelfth tribe (*Kli Yakar*).

The *Zohar* suggests that Jacob did not wait for the birth of Benjamin since he knew that Benjamin would be born in *Eretz Yisrael*.

— שְׁלַחֲנִי וְאֶלְכָה אֶל מְקוֹמִי וְלֹאֲרָצִי — *Grant me leave [following Radak; lit. send me] that I may go [lit. and I will go] to my place and to my land.*

I.e., to my place which is in my land, *Eretz Yisrael*. Jacob thus made it abundantly clear to Laban that he did not consider his place to be Charan even though it was his grandfather's ancestral home, and the birthplace of his mother, wives, and children (*Hoffmann*).

[Compare *R' Bachya's* interpretation of my place in 18:33.]

26. תָּנָה אֶת־נָשִׁי וְאֶת יְלָדֵי ... וְאֶלְכָה — *Give [me] my wives and my children ... and I will go.*

[We find nowhere that Laban was physically detaining Jacob's wives. Therefore, the expression 'give'

of Isaac's servants to fetch Jacob. Jacob heeded them and requested leave from Laban, but Laban convinced him to stay on.

When Isaac's servants saw that Jacob would not return with them, they departed. Deborah, however, remained with Jacob and resided with his wives until six years later when Jacob left.

Deborah died during the journey home. [See *Rashi* to 35:8.]

may go to my place and to my land. ²⁶ Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and I will go. For you are aware of my service that I labored for you.'

²⁷ But Laban said to him, 'If I have found favor with you! — I have learned by divination that HASHEM has blessed me on account of you.' ²⁸ And

must be understood as 'give me permission to leave with my wives and children' (Mizrachi; Tzeidah laDerech):

— I have no wish to leave except with your permission (Rashi).

Though I labored for them, I still request your permission (Sechel Tov).

כִּי אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֶת עֲבָדְתִּי אֲשֶׁר עָבַדְתִּיךָ
— For you are aware of my service that I labored for you.

You cannot capriciously detain them. I served you for them, and I must take them back with me to my land (Radak).

Hoffmann interprets: You are fully cognizant of the benefits you reaped as a result of my devoted service to you for them.

27. [Laban is reluctant to part with Jacob who, as he admits, served him well, and in whose merit God had blessed him]:

אִם-יָנֹא מִצָּאִתִּי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ — If I have found favor with you [lit. in your eyes].

I.e., 'If you love me to the degree that our kinship would warrant' [the implication being]: You would not leave me (Sforno).

נִחְשַׁתִּי — I have learned by divination.

Laban was a diviner, and the verb means: 'I have discovered by my art of divination' (Rashi).

The term נִחֵשׁ refers to a form of occult art, of the categories mentioned in Deut. 18:10-11. Rashi there explains it as one who foretells or interprets omens: 'that the bread fell from his mouth, or that a deer crossed his path, or that his stick fell from his hand.' In Lev. 19:26, Rashi adds to this category those who elicit omens from the cry of a weasel, and from the [formation or twittering of] birds. [See Sanhedrin 65b and Rambam Hilchos Avodah Zarah 11:4,5.]

Ramban, following Targum Yonasan and Radak holds that the word basically connotes testing. Ibn Ezra suggests that it implies testing specifically by use of divinations with teraphim [see comm. to 31:19]: i.e. I have tested the matter with my occult powers through the medium of my teraphim and conclude that HASHEM has blessed me on account of you.

Laban hypocritically speaks in self-righteous tones, not admitting that he would like to keep Jacob because of his great ability. In those terms, he would have been compelled to make some concrete business proposal. Instead, Laban informs Jacob that he is moved by a נִיחֻשׁ, a sort of superstitious belief. Laban believes that the God of Jacob has blessed him on account of such a pious servant (R' Munk).

וְנִכְרַכְנִי ה' בְּגִלְלָהּ — That HASHEM has blessed me on account of you.

I.e. on account of you and your

ויצא כח בגללה: ויאמר נקבה שכרה עלי ואתנה:
 לוכח לא כט ויאמר אליו אתה ידעת את אשר
 עבדתיך ואת אשר-היה מקנה אתי: כי
 מעט אשר-היה לך לפני ויפרץ לרב
 ויברך יהוה אתה לרגלי ועתה מתי
 אעשה גם-אנכי לבייתי: ויאמר מה אתן- לא

merit for you are a righteous man (Ramban).

'It is through you that I have been blessed. When you first came here I had no sons, now I have sons.' That Laban had no sons prior to Jacob's arrival is obvious since he certainly would not have allowed a little girl, *Rachel*, to tend the flocks if he had had sons [29:6]. Now he had sons as stated in 31:1 (Rashi).

— I have this superstitious notion that HASHEM, the God Whom you serve, has brought me luck because you are so righteous. That is why I do not like to let such a pious man depart from me (R' Hoffman).

28. Laban had hoped the pious man would be flattered by this acknowledgment of Heavenly intervention, and declare himself willing to remain without asking for pay. But when Jacob remained silent, Laban realized that he would have to offer an inducement. Accordingly, he asked Jacob to stipulate his terms (R' Hirsch).

נקבה שכרה עלי ואתנה — Specify your wage to me (עלי here having the sense of אלי (Heidenheim)) and I will give it.

The term נקבה שכרה is to be interpreted as Onkelos renders it: פרוש אנך (Rashi).

Harav David Feinstein notes the use of the word עלי, literally upon

me, related to עול, yoke, an unpleasant burden that is placed upon an unwilling bearer. To Laban, the very idea that someone had the right to demand fair payment for services rendered, constituted a heavy, onerous yoke.

29. Jacob reiterates his position:

אתה ידעת את אשר עבדתיך — You know [lit. have known] how I served you.

I.e., the loyalty and full strength with which I served you (Ramban).

[See R'Hirsch in footnote next verse.]

ואת אשר היה מקנה אתי — And what your cattle were with me.

I.e. and you are fully aware of the small number of your cattle that were originally entrusted to me (Rashi).

Or: And you are aware of ... how long your sheep were under my care — for it was indeed many years (Abarbanel).

Others render: And how your cattle fared with me (Ralbag).

30. מעט אשר-היה לך לפני — For the little that you had before I came [lit. before me] has expanded substantially [lit. and it has spread forth to abundance].

The translation follows R Hirsch. Jacob declared that before he arrived, Laban had small

30 he said, 'Specify your wage to me and I will give it.'
 29-31 ²⁹ But he said to him 'You know who I served you and what your cattle were with me. ³⁰ For the little that you had before I came has expounded substantially as HASHEM has blessed you with my coming. And now, when will I also do something for my own house?'

³¹ He said, 'What shall I give you?' And Jacob said,

numbers of animals, but that his livestock had increased dramatically as a result of his, Jacob's labors.

— Laban's flock had increased in a supernatural way (Ramban).

לְרַגְלִי — וְיָבֹרַךְ ה' אִתְּךָ לְרַגְלִי
 HASHEM has blessed you with my coming [lit. to my foot].

I.e., the blessing has come to you on account of my having set foot here. Compare the similar use of רַגְלִי in Exodus 11:8: *The people who have come with you* [בְּרַגְלֵיךָ lit. at your feet]; Judges 8:5: *the people that come with me* [בְּרַגְלֵי, lit. at my foot] (Midrash; Rashi).

— Only HASHEM's blessing makes one rich [Proverbs 10:22], and that blessing was manifest from the time I set foot in your house (Ibn Ezra; Ramban).

[The word לְרַגְלִי, at the foot of, is figuratively understood in the sense of on account of. Cf. Rashi Yoma 38b s.v. רַגְלֵי חֲסִידֵי. Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 1:8) similarly explains the connotation: because of me or as a kindness to me.]

R'Hirsch explains the connotation to mean after my ways.¹¹

מִתִּי אַעֲשֶׂה גַם-אֲנֹכִי לְבֵיתִי — When will I also do something for my own house?

— My sons alone have been providing for me up to now. The time has come when I must join with them and assist them. גַּם-אֲנֹכִי, I also must bear the responsibility of earning a living for my own family (Rashi).

Ramban and Radak understand גַּם as modifying my house: Jacob argued, 'When shall I provide for my house also, as I have provided for your house up to now?' Since even Jacob's oldest child was only six at this time, Ramban considers it unlikely that Jacob's children were shepherds. [The word גַּם does not always precede the word it is accentuating. Hence Ramban renders our passage as if it were written מִתִּי אַעֲשֶׂה אֲנֹכִי גַם לְבֵיתִי. Cf. Numbers 22:33 where גַּם אֶתְּכָה הָרְגָתִי [lit. also you I would have slain] is interpreted as if it were written גַּם הָרְגָתִי אֶתְּכָה, also I would have slain you [see Rashi there].

31. [Laban presses further]:

מָה אֶתֶּן לָךְ — What shall I give you?

[You are concerned now about providing for your own household.] What shall I give you to compensate for what you could expect to earn

1. Jacob says: You have no need to attribute your blessed prosperity to an abstract idea that God provided for you, as you put it, בְּגִלְגִּי, for my sake. You can just as well attribute your blessing to a more tangible factor: לְרַגְלֵי, [according to the pattern] taken by my feet. Day and night I served you, following your flocks and caring for them. God took account not of my piety, but of my diligence. Now the time has come when I must utilize my industriousness to provide for my family (R' Hirsch).

לך ונאמר יעקב לא-תתן-לי מאומה ויצא ללב
 אם-תעשה-לי הדבר הזה אשובה
 לב ארעה צאנך אשמר: אעבר בכל-צאנך
 היום הסר משם כל-שה | נקד וטלוא
 וכל-שה-חום בפשבים וטלוא ונקד

[if you were to work for yourself]?
 (Sforno).

Jacob consents to remain.

[He proceeds to propose an arrangement by which, in the natural order of events, he would gain little]:

Do not give me anything — לא תתן לי מאומה
 anything [or: You will not give me
 anything.]

Do not give me anything of the
 flocks you now possess; whatever
 you profited from my past work is
 yours because I worked for the right
 to marry your daughters. My wage
 for continuing to tend your flocks
 will come from those unnaturally
 colored animals which will be born
 in the future (Rashbam).

Whatever I gain as a result of our
 agreement will not come from you;
 God's grace to me will not diminish
 your possessions in any way. As the
 Sages proclaimed (Yoma 38b): אין
 אדם נוגע במוכן לחרבו, No man can
 touch what is prepared for his fel-
 low (Sforno).

R' Hirsch interprets differently.
 Jacob did not wish to be dependent on
 Laban to give him his wages when they
 became due. Jacob had experienced too
 much of Laban's deception, and finding
 ways to avoid payment of debts.
 Therefore, Jacob insisted on an arrange-
 ment whereby he would rely on his own
 exceptional skill as a shepherd, and his
 wages would automatically be his
 property without the need to collect it
 from Laban.

אם תעשה לי הדבר הזה — If you will
 do this thing for me.

[I.e. that which I am about to
 propose to you].

[Rashi, in Bava Metzia 94a s.v. תנאי
 קיש בו מצשה בתחילתו, cites Jacob's stipula-
 tion as a classic example of a condition which
 is preceded by an action. See Mishnah and
 commentaries there.]

אשובה ארעה צאנך אשמר — [Then] I
 will resume pasturing and guarding
 your flocks [lit. I will return, I will
 pasture your flock, I will guard.]

According to Midrash Lekach
 Tov the terms pasture and guard are
 not redundant, there are shepherds
 who pasture but do not keep guard.
 I will both feed and keep guard.

According to R'Bachya the addi-
 tion of אשמר, I will guard, implies:
 I will become a שומר שכר, a hired
 guardian [with the accompanying
 obligations. As the Mishnah states
 in Shavuot 49a, a hired guardian is
 responsible for loss and theft, while
 a שומר חנם, unpaid guardian, is
 not, provided, of course, he has not
 been deliberately negligent.]

HaKsav V'HaKabbalah notes that the
 cantillation of אשובה (תכיר) is disjunctive, in-
 dicating that the word is not attached to
 those that follow. Therefore, he interprets
 each part of this phrase as a separate
 thought: אשובה, I shall withdraw my deci-
 sion to return to Canaan; ארעה צאנך, I will
 pasture your flock; אשמר, I will await your
 execution of the agreement between us. The
 term שומר is used in the sense of await or an-
 ticipate in 37:11.

32. Jacob's wages.

[Although the commentators dif-

'Do not give me anything. If you will do this thing for me, I will resume pasturing and guarding your flocks: ³² Let me pass through your whole flock today. Remove from there every speckled or spotted sheep, every brownish lamb among the sheep and the

fer as to the precise interpretation of every detail of the narrative, the arrangement by which Jacob agrees to work is *basically* as follows: Laban will remove from the flocks in Jacob's care certain animals of *abnormal color*, leaving the normally colored ones with Jacob. Of the animals to be born in the future from the flocks he was tending, Jacob would be permitted to keep the *abnormally* colored ones. All others would belong to Laban. See alternate interpretation in footnote, end of v. 35.]

הָסֵר מִשָּׁם — Remove from there.

The commentators differ on whether the word הָסֵר, *remove*, is to be interpreted in the imperative: *you remove*, or as an infinitive participle: *I will pass through your whole flock today removing* [i.e., and I (Jacob) will remove] *from there*. Our translation, in the imperative, follows *Rashi* here and in v. 35, *Radak*, *Ramban* and most classical commentators.

Malbim [following the alternate view cited in footnote end of v. 35] maintains that Jacob would himself *pass through and remove* all these unnaturally colored sheep.

כָּל שֶׁהָיָה נֶקֶד וְטָלוֹא — Every speckled or [lit. and] spotted sheep.

[The Hebrew word שֶׁהָיָה is a collective term that refers both to a young *בֶּכֶשֶׂה*, *lamb*, and a young *עֵז*, *kid*, regardless of sex, as is clear from *Exodus* 12:5. Hence the need for further clarification of עֵזִים, *young goat*, and שֶׁהָיָה בֶּכֶשֶׂה, *young sheep*. See *Rashi* there and *Mishnah*

Bechoros 1:5. The term נֶקֶד occurring alone refers to a sheep within its first year.]

According to *Ramban's* interpretation of *Rashi* [see end of verse] the designation שֶׁהָיָה here refers specifically to the *he-goats* (תְּנִשִּׁים) mentioned below in v. 35, while עֵזִים, *goats*, mentioned further in our verse refers to the *she-goats*. Following this interpretation, Jacob's pay came only from goats, not from sheep.

In his own interpretation, *Ramban* [end of verse] suggests that שֶׁהָיָה refers to the *sheep*.

Many commentators — cf. *Radak*, *Sforno*, *Haamek Davar*, *Hoffmann* — interpret שֶׁהָיָה as a collective term for both the lambs and kids [see above]. First Jacob makes this *general* statement regarding the unnaturally colored young animals, then he goes on to *specify* exactly which distinguishing discolorations will apply respectively to the lambs and goats.

The term נֶקֶד, *speckled*, refers to animals marked with *small* dot-like specks, while טָלוֹא, *spotted* is related to טָלָאִים, *patches*, and has the meaning of *wide patches* (*Rashi*).

The translation 'speckled or spotted' follows *Ramban*.

וְכָל־שֶׁהָיָה בֶּכֶשֶׂה — [And] every brownish lamb among the sheep.

Rashi explains that חֹזֶם is related to the term שְׁחֹזֶם, *reddish brown*; rouge in Old French.

Ibn Ezra and *Radak* render חֹזֶם as

ויצא לה ללד-לה לו יהי כדברך: ויטר ביום ההוא את-התישים העקדים והטלאים ואת כל-העזים הנקדות והטלאת כל אשר-לבן בו וכל-חום בכשבים ויתן ביד-בגיו:

— כל אשר איננו נקד...גנוב הוא אתי
Any among the goats that is not speckled or spotted, or among the sheep that is not brownish may be regarded as stolen if in possession [lit. it is stolen with me].

— I.e. if any normal monochrome animal is found among my flocks it may be presumed that I have stolen it [from your flocks] (Rashi).

— Should you ask, if all such spotted animals are eliminated, from where shall my animals come in the future, let that be my worry. I will rely on my righteousness. God has blessed me until now for your benefit, and He will do the same for my benefit. This will be demonstrated later and no normal monochrome animal will remain in my possession. Otherwise you may count it as stolen (Alshich).

34. [Laban apparently assumed that the pure white and pure black animals left with Jacob would bear only a trifling percentage of mis-colored young. Such would have indeed been the case were it not that Jacob — betrayed by Laban's changing of the terms — adopted special measures as will be explained later. Laban is gratified at the apparently advantageous terms and agrees to them at once]:

1. *Sefer HaParshiyos* preserves a Midrashic interpretation that there was something sinister even in this 'innocent' remark of the deceitful Laban. Following as it does Jacob's statement: גנוב הוא אתי. It may be regarded as stolen if in my possession, Laban's response implied: 'Yes, may it be as you say — may I discover a monochrome animal unjustly in your possession, giving me grounds to nullify our whole agreement!'

הן — Agreed! [lit. yes].

Following Rashi: an expression denoting agreement with a suggested proposition.

לו יהי כדברך — If only it would remain as you say [lit. like your words].

If only you would remain satisfied with this! (Rashi).

Woe to the wicked whose own words are perverse — state the Sages — and who imagine others to be like themselves. Here Laban expressed the hope that Jacob would abide by his word, but afterwards it was said of Laban [31:7]: But your father cheated me, and changed my wages ten times! (Midrash HaGadol).⁽¹⁾

35. [In practice, Laban does not allow Jacob to remove the colored animals (see v. 32). Furthermore, the deceitful Laban removes more of the flock than he was entitled to under the original terms]:

וַיִּסָּר בְּיוֹם הַהוּא — So [lit. and] he removed on that very day.

[The subject is Laban.] No time is wasted: The devious Laban, taking no chances, proceeds to divide his flock that very day (Ralbag).

[See alternate view of Or Zarua cited in footnote, end of this verse.]

Malbim interprets the original deal in

30 or among the sheep that is not brownish may be
34-35 regarded as stolen if in my possession.'

³⁴ And Laban said, 'Agreed! If only it would remain as you say.'

³⁵ So he removed on that very day the ringed and spotted he-goats and all the speckled and spotted goats — every one that contained white, as well as all the brownish ones among the sheep, and he left them

verse 32 to imply that it was Jacob himself who was to remove certain unnaturally colored animals, but in this verse, he interprets that *Laban* is the subject. Laban immediately proceeded to make unilateral changes in the terms agreed upon in verse 32. Although Jacob had specified that all existing spotted and speckled animals were to be given him, Laban took possession of them for himself. Furthermore, Jacob wanted multi-colored animals to remain intermixed with the flocks, but Laban removed them as well, leaving only the monochrome animals from whom the birth of the agreed-upon mutations would be highly improbable. Lastly, by taking the initiative in renegeing on his agreements, Laban set the precedent on that very day which allowed him to change the terms whenever it suited him to do so. He did this by constantly reading new interpretations and shadings into the terms to which he had agreed.

הַתְּיָשִׁים הַעֲקָרִים וְהַטְּלָאִים — The ringed and spotted he-goats.

The term עֲקָרִים [ringed] literally means *bound*, and refers to those animals which are differently colored at the point where animals are usually bound by their owners: the ankles of their forelegs and hindlegs (*Rashi* v. 39).

In 22:9, the verb וַעֲקַר, *he bound*, occurs in reference to Abraham's binding of Isaac's hands and feet behind him. *Rashi* there refers to the word עֲקָרִים in our verse which he similarly explains as meaning: whose ankles were [ringed] white, so that the place where they are bound can be plainly recognized.

The terminology here differs markedly from the arrangement formulated in v. 32. As *Ramban* explains there [differing from *Ibn Ezra*], in the original deal

no reference was made specifically to he-goats, yet, *Ramban* points out, Laban now took the he-goats as well so as to avoid the genetic influence of the spotted and speckled males. He went further and [besides the spotted goats], he even removed those with ringed markings on their legs.

In effect he was making it almost impossible for Jacob to earn any animals within the terms of the agreement. Indeed, only by a miracle would any new animals be born with any markings whatsoever! (*R' Hirsch*).

In the interpretation of *Rashi* according to which he-goats were originally referred to by the designation טָהוֹ, Laban similarly deviated from the original terms by taking even those with ringed markings, as well as any that had even the slightest marking of white [see further].

Following *Sforno*, Laban deviated by taking not only the young, but even the mature animals with those mutations.

וְאֵת כָּל־הַעֲצִיּוֹת הַנִּקְדָּוֹת וְהַטְּלָאִים — And all the spotted and speckled goats.

These refer, as in v. 32, to the she-goats (*Ramban*).

כָּל אֲשֶׁר־לָבָן בּוֹ וְכָל חֹם בְּבָבֶשִׁים — Every one that contained white [i.e. a white spot (*Rashi*)], as well as [lit. and] all the brownish ones among the sheep.

The translation follows *Ramban* who renders this phrase as referring entirely to the sheep [which according to *Ramban* were usually

וַיִּצָא לוֹ לְלֹדוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם דָּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בֵּינוּ וּבֵין יַעֲקֹב
וַיַּעֲקֹב רָעָה אֶת-צֹאן לָבָן הַנּוֹתֵרֶת:
וַיִּקַּח-לוֹ יַעֲקֹב מִקָּל לִבָּנָהּ לֶחֱ וּלְוֹ

dark in those regions]: Laban went beyond the original terms and removed whatever sheep had even the slightest white spot in addition to the brownish sheep which he was entitled to.

Ramban continues that it is also possible that the phrase *every one that had white in it* is connected with the earlier part of the verse and refers to the goats, in which case the brownish sheep were in addition to the speckled and spotted ones [which, according to Ramban, in v. 32 applied to the sheep as well]. The brownish sheep, as noted, were originally stipulated by Jacob because such color in sheep was highly improbable [and it made Laban even more eager to accept the deal. But now, taking no chances, Laban removed even those few brownish sheep in addition to the speckled and spotted ones, to

diminish Jacob's chances as much as possible. It further exposes the cunning of Laban].

וַיִּתֵּן בִּידֵי-בָנָיו — And he [=Laban] left [them] in the charge of his sons [lit. and he gave in the hand of his sons].¹¹

36. [As an additional precaution, Laban places a considerable distance between the flocks he separated and the flocks he left with Jacob]:

וַיִּשֶׂם דָּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בֵּינוּ וּבֵין יַעֲקֹב — And he [Laban] put a distance of three days [lit. a three days' journey] between himself and [between] Jacob.

[For fear that there might be contact between these flocks and those tended by Jacob.]

וַיַּעֲקֹב רָעָה אֶת צֹאן לָבָן הַנּוֹתֵרֶת — And Jacob tended [the Hebrew רָעָה denotes a constant action: was

1. There is an alternate interpretation of this incident mentioned by the early halachic codifier R' Yitzchak of Vienna [ca. 1200 – 1270] in his work *Or Zarua*, Responsa 769. It is basically also the view of *Sefer HaYashar*, and cited with differences by Abarbanel followed by Malbim.

According to it, Jacob's wage included the existing unnaturally colored sheep separated from Laban's flock as well as the offspring which would later be born of them. The verb הָסַר in v. 32 is not imperative but an infinitive participle, and refers to Jacob himself: *I will pass through your flocks today, removing them*. Accordingly, the expression *that will be my wage*, refers to these sheep that Jacob would thus separate from Laban's flocks. Consequently, the subject of the phrase *and he left them in the charge of his sons* is Jacob, who separated these animals and placed them in the care of his own children, Reuben and Simeon.

Following this view, Jacob could be accused of no trickery whatsoever since he used the peeled rods to influence only his own flocks. According to this interpretation even the monochrome offspring of Jacob's own flocks would remain his, but Jacob went beyond the strict letter of the arrangement and used the rods to assure that all his own flocks would be born spotted and speckled, thereby making it impossible for Laban to accuse him of stealing monochrome animals.

Jacob segregated the unnaturally colored sheep born of Laban's flocks which Jacob separated [v. 40] to assure that too many of Laban's newborn animals would not be colored unnaturally. Jacob's dream was intended to show him that Divine influence caused Laban's monochrome

30 in the charge of his sons. ³⁶ And he put a distance of
36-37 three days between himself and Jacob; and Jacob
 tended Laban's remaining flock.

³⁷ Jacob then took himself a fresh rod of poplar

tending or would tend] Laban's remaining flock.

— [The word נותרת, *remaining*, is interpreted in the Midrash as connoting the leftover, inferior sheep]:

Laban's remaining sheep — the defective, sickly and barren animals among them, which were nothing but the leftovers — these Laban handed over to Jacob (*Rashi*).

[Laban was confident that even under these circumstances — given Jacob's devoted service and the blessing of his presence — Jacob would be able to increase the flocks even from these sickly animals. This indeed took place, but Laban did not expect that Jacob would respond to his trickery in kind by enlarging his own flocks as well, although scrupulously adhering to the letter of the deal between them.]

same markings as the rod they were facing. Cf. *Megillah* 13b which justifies Jacob's actions by citing *Psalms* 18:27: with the trustworthy, act trustingly; and with the crooked, act perversely. See footnote to v. 42, and *Overview*.]

R' Bachya — and many early commentators — emphasize that Jacob did not resort to the device of the peeled rods on his own initiative but after the angel informed him in a dream [31:12]: Raise your eyes ... and see that all the he-goats mounting the flocks are ringed. Although the dream is described later, it preceded Jacob's peeling of the rods described now. As we have often seen, the Torah is not always written in chronological sequence.

לח מקל לבנה — A fresh [lit. moist] rod of poplar.

The word לבנה, *poplar*, refers to a tree by that name mentioned also in *Hoshea* 4:13. It is referred to in Old French as *tremble* [=trembling poplar; aspen, a species of poplar] which is white [hence the name *livneh* from *lavan*, white]. He took it while it was still fresh (*Rashi*).

R' Bachya explains it as a rod of

37. The peeled rods.

[Jacob resorts to several devices to outwit his uncle and regain what was rightfully his under the original terms of the arrangement. He places colored rods in front of the flocks at the time they conceived, so that they would bear lambs having the

sheep to bear so many spotted and speckled offspring. This interpretation of verses 41-42 takes the term מקשרות to imply the unnaturally colored sheep, before whom Jacob placed the peeled sticks, while with צטופים, *monochrome flocks*, Jacob did nothing.

Ramban in v. 30 and *Ibn Ezra* in v. 35 disagree with the above view [known to them apparently from earlier sources since *R' Yitzchak* of Vienna lived after them]. They maintain that v. 35 could not refer to Reuben and Simeon because they were mere children while Laban's sons were older. Accordingly, הָסֵר, *remove*, in v. 32 must be imperative, as explained in the mainstream of the commentary. [See *Malbim*.]

There are, in general, many difficulties with the above interpretation, which led *Riva* to maintain that it is more of a justification of Jacob's actions than a reflection of the simple sense of the verses.

וַיַּעַמּוּן וַיַּפְצֵל בָּהֶן פְּצִלוֹת לְכֹנֹת
מַחֲשֵׁף הַלֵּכָן אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַמִּקְלוֹת: וַיַּצַּג
אֶת-הַמִּקְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר פָּצַל בְּרֶהֱטִים
בְּשִׁקְתוֹת הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר תְּבֹאֵן, הַצֵּאֵן
לְשִׁתוֹת לִנְכַח הַצֵּאֵן וַיַּחֲמֶנָה בְּבֹאֵן

וַיַּצַּג
לְלַח

the cedar trees of the type which grow in Lebanon.^[1]

And [rods of (following Rashi)]: hazel and chestnut.

The term לוֹ is familiarly translated as *almond* (so Ibn Ezra). As always, however, our translation follows Rashi who renders the term here as "a tree upon which small nuts grow; in Old French *coudre*" [= *coudrier*, the hazel tree.]

Rashi translates עַמּוּן as *casten-oir* [= black chestnut.] [Some others identify it with the sycamore tree.]

וַיַּפְצֵל בָּהֶן פְּצִלוֹת לְכֹנֹת — [And] he peeled white streaks [lit. peelings] in them.

The word פְּצִלוֹת means *peelings*. He made many peelings which resulted in giving them a streaked appearance (Rashi).

[Some of the species, as noted, have white barks in which case the exposed peeled portion was dark. This passage speaks of the dark species in which he peeled white streaks.]

מַחֲשֵׁף הַלֵּכָן אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַמִּקְלוֹת — *Laying bare the white of* [lit. which was upon] the rods.

I.e. by peeling off portions of the [dark] bark, he uncovered the peeled portions which were white (Rashi).

וַיַּצַּג אֶת-הַמִּקְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר פָּצַל — And he set up the rods which he had peeled.

The verb וַיַּצַּג [set up] is translated by Onkelos וַיַּעֲזִיב, which means *inserting, setting up* (Rashi).

בְּרֶהֱטִים בְּשִׁקְתוֹת הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר תְּבֹאֵן, הַצֵּאֵן לְשִׁתוֹת — In the runnels, in the watering receptacles to which the flocks came [lit. would (regularly) come] to drink.

[The verb רָחַט is the Aramaic of רָוַן, *run*]: בְּרֶהֱטִים, in the runnels, i.e. in the currents [מְרוּצוֹת, *running streams*] of water running in gutters made in the earth, where the sheep regularly came to drink (Rashi) ...

Rashi thus defines רֶהֱטִים, the Aramaic for *run*, as *running streams*, and he defines שִׁקְתוֹת as *gutters dug in the earth* (Mizrachi). [The above is apparently offered to distinguish between the closely related terms רֶהֱטִים and שִׁקְתוֹת הַמַּיִם. However, when the word רֶהֱטִים occurs alone as further in verse 41, it is familiarly rendered *runnels*, or, as Ibn Ezra suggests, *watering troughs*.]

[Comp. the allegorical interpretation of *Song of Songs* 7:7: מֶלֶךְ אֲסוּר בְּרֶהֱטִים (lit. a king bound in tresses) where the Hebrew word *rehatim*, tresses, is esoterically related to the *rehatim*, watering troughs, of our episode: God (the 'King') is bound in love to Israel (i.e., Jacob) who peeled the rods in the *rehatim*, watering troughs.]

לִנְכַח הַצֵּאֵן — Facing the sheep. [This modifies the placing of the

1. We do not find that Jacob used רֹחַם, *reddish-brown*, colored rods to influence the birth of such sheep. Apparently he did not find any such naturally colored trees, and he would not risk the chance of painting such a color on other trees lest he arouse the curiosity of Laban's people (R' Bachya).

30 and hazel and chestnut. He peeled white streaks in
38-39 them, laying bare the white of the rods.³⁸ And he set
 up the rods which he had peeled, in the runnels — in
 the watering receptacles to which the flocks came to
 drink — facing the sheep, so they would become
 stimulated when they came to drink.³⁹ Then the

rods in the beginning of the verse]:
 I.e., there, in the watering troughs
 Jacob set up the rods facing the
 sheep (Rashi).

[Rashi means to negate the following mis-
 reading of the verse: ... to the watering
 receptacles to which the flocks came to drink
 facing the sheep. Such a literal reading of
 the verse would mean that one group of
 sheep came to drink facing another group of
 sheep (Mizrachi).]

Malbim differs. In his interpretation,
 the sheep were positioned so that they
 faced one another as they drank. As he
 emphasizes, the birth of the discolored
 animals was purely miraculous as
 revealed to Jacob in 31:12. Jacob's pur-
 pose was merely to perform a physical
 act which would 'assist', so to speak, the
 performance of the miracle. Such sym-
 bolic acts are often found in connection
 with prophecies and miracles. Jacob's
 intention, therefore, was to arouse the
 sheep through the sight of other spotted
 and speckled sheep and thereby in-
 fluence their pigmentation. The groups
 faced one another, and the peeled rods

which Jacob set up between them
 created the optical illusion that the
 sheep which they were facing were
 spotted and speckled as well. [See foot-
 note below.]

וַיִּחַמְּקָהּ בְּבָאֵן לִשְׁתּוֹן — So [lit. and]
 they would become stimulated [lit.
 heated; i.e. excited; startled] when
 they came to drink.

When the female animals would
 see the rods [in their watering
 troughs] they would become start-
 led and would recoil backwards. At
 that moment, the males would
 mount them, and they would later
 give birth to lambs having the same
 markings as the rod they were fac-
 ing (Rashi).¹¹

Others render the word וַיִּחַמְּקָהּ to
 mean mated or bred, the verse in-
 forming us that the flocks were ac-
 customed to breed when they con-
 gregated to drink water.

This, too, was one of the miracles

1. [The physiological principle harnessed by Jacob in this episode illustrates a practical familiarity with parapsychological phenomena influencing the pigmentation of flocks through visual stimulus.

Indeed, the *Talmud* and *Midrash* provide many examples where even among humans meditation during marital intimacy can have major effects on the conceived child (see R' Bachya cited in commentary, next page).

From 31:12 it emerges that these laws of heredity were revealed to Jacob when an angel, ap-
 pearing to him, opened his eyes to a comprehension of the subject.

There are opinions, noted later in the commentary, that the discolored pigmentations were the result of a miracle designed to preserve him from Laban's trickery. (In fact in *Midrash Tehillim* 8:6 the implication is that Jacob was able to make the sheep come out as he pleased through pure meditation). Jacob, however, used the rods so that the miracle could be achieved in a natural way (comp. *Ramban's* explanation regarding Noah's ark in 6:19).

Jacob's action, then, did not bring forth the miracle but only accompanied it. Similarly, Moses and Aaron stretched out their rods for the plagues in Egypt. Nothing is more exclusive-
 ly in God's power than life, breeding, and giving birth. In the final analysis, only He can cause
 spotted cattle to be born (cf. *Midrash HaGadol*).]

וּיצא לַלֵּט־ט לְשָׁתוֹת: וַיַּחֲמוּ הַצֹּאן אֶל-הַמַּקְלוֹת וַתִּלְדוּן. הַצֹּאן עֲקָדִים נִקְדִּים וּטְלָאִים: מ וְהַכְּשָׁבִים הַפְּרִיר יַעֲקֹב וַיִּתֵּן פָּנֵי הַצֹּאן אֶל-עֶקֶד וְכָל-חֹם בָּצָאן לָבֵן וַיֵּשֶׁת לוֹ עֲרִירִים לְבָדוֹ וְלֹא שָׁתָם עַל-צֹאן לָבֵן:

of the episode, that the flocks should be aroused to mate just on that occasion (*Malbim*).

R' Bachya observes that this concept contains an important lesson. If the imagination is a determining factor for the nature of the unborn lambs, as this verse describes, then how much more important will it be when sensitive, thinking human beings procreate! Therefore, when husband and wife unite, they must keep their minds purged of all impure thoughts and every element which is foreign or which concerns third parties. The degree of their moral and spiritual purity will have repercussions on the souls of their children (*R' Munk*).

Rashi proceeds to cite the view of *R' Hoshia* that the water the animals drank changed miraculously into semen, and they did not require a male [to impregnate them.]

Gur Aryeh explains that *R' Hoshia's* interpretation has two bases: 1) The verse attaches the stimulation of the sheep to their coming to drink rather than to the rods; b) The word נִקְדִּים is a combination of the male form, וַיַּחֲמוּ, and the feminine form וַתִּקְדֶּינָה. This implies that the male and female functions were combined in the same animals.

Possibly *R' Hoshia* holds that the verb נִקְדִּים means they became pregnant when they came to drink (*Mizrachi*).

39. [Having provided a general description of Jacob's device, the Torah now proceeds to further detail the actual procedure]:

וַיַּחֲמוּ הַצֹּאן אֶל הַמַּקְלוֹת — Then [lit.

and] the flocks became stimulated by [lit. toward] the rods.

I.e. at the appearance of the [stripped] rods (*Rashi*). [As *Rashi* explains above in his primary interpretation, the startled sheep would recoil backwards at which time the males would mount them and they would conceive.]

Malbim observes that the fact that they were influenced by the speckled rods rather than by the more numerous monochrome animals was a further manifestation of God's Hand in this matter.

— וַתִּלְדוּן. הַצֹּאן עֲקָדִים נִקְדִּים וּטְלָאִים — And the flocks gave birth to ringed ones, speckled ones, and spotted ones.

[I.e. to offspring having the same markings as the rod they were facing (*Rashi* v. 38).]

[The terms ringed, spotted and speckled are defined in verses 32 and 35.]

40. [Jacob separates the flocks, making the newborn spotted ones lead the monochrome ones, so the latter would be influenced by the leaders and bear similar offspring]:

וְהַכְּשָׁבִים הַפְּרִיר יַעֲקֹב — Jacob segregated the lambs — that were thus born ringed and spotted.

— And he formed them into a separate flock (*Rashi*).

וַיִּתֵּן פָּנֵי הַצֹּאן אֶל-עֶקֶד וְכָל-חֹם בָּצָאן לָבֵן — And he made the sheep face the ringed ones and all the brownish

flocks became stimulated by the rods and the flocks gave birth to ringed ones, speckled ones and spotted ones. ⁴⁰ Jacob segregated the lambs and he made the sheep face the ringed ones and all the brownish ones among Laban's flocks. He formed separate flocks of his own and did not mingle them with Laban's sheep.

ones among Laban's flocks.

That is, he separated these ringed and spotted sheep [i.e. lambs, which, according to most interpretations of Rashi in v. 32, did not belong to Jacob, as only the newborn brownish lambs were to be his (*Gur Aryeh*)] and made them head the flock of monochrome sheep' [a collective term for ungulates including both sheep and goats] so that the latter would look at these ringed and spotted lambs as well as at the brownish ones [i.e., goats, see below] which Laban had left him (*Rashi*).

Following Ramban's interpretation of Rashi's exegesis, Jacob's intention was that the sight of these particular animals [i.e., the ringed and spotted lambs and brownish goats, both of which did not belong to Jacob, according to this interpretation of Rashi] would, like the rods, stimulate the remaining monochrome flocks to bear part-colored offspring of the species which would belong to him, viz. ringed and spotted goats and brownish lambs.

The 'brownish ones' mentioned by Rashi refer to those brownish goats left him by Laban. It could not refer to the brownish sheep since verse 35 explicitly mentions that Laban removed them. Laban had not removed the brownish goats since they would not belong to Jacob in any event [v. 32], just as in verse 35, according to this interpretation, Laban had not removed the ringed and spotted sheep (*Tzeidah LaDerech*; see *Sifsei Chachomim*; *Mizrachi*).

[Jacob's intention in taking these goats

was that when the white sheep would gaze at the brownish goats, they would bear brownish offspring. These newborn brownish sheep would be Jacob's since, following this interpretation, he was to keep only the brownish ones among the sheep.]

According to Ramban's own interpretation of the episode [i.e. that the ringed sheep as well as the brownish sheep were included in Jacob's wage], Jacob took extra pains to influence the birth of such sheep. He did not content himself with having the sheep gaze at rods because lambs are sturdier than goats and they require more signs to stimulate them, and because there were no brownish sticks for him to set up [see footnote to v. 37.] Therefore he caused the lambs to gaze upon brownish goats. The intent of the verse is that Jacob separated the monochrome, unspotted lambs and caused these lambs — referred to collectively as flocks rather than again as lambs — to gaze upon the ringed flocks as well as upon the brownish ones. Following this interpretation, the term *בצאן לָבָן*, among Laban's flocks does not imply that these spotted flocks belonged to Laban, for in fact they did not. Rather it intimates: so did he do with all of Laban's flocks.

וַיִּשָּׂא לוֹ עֲרֵדִים לְבָדוֹ — [And] he formed [lit. placed] separate flocks of his own [lit. by himself.]

[Of these separated sheep] as explained above (*Rashi*)

[Cf. *Gur Aryeh*].

וְלֹא שָׁתַם עִל צֹאן לָבָן — And did not mingle [lit. place] them with [lit. on] Laban's sheep.

So that he would not be subject to suspicion. Jacob's flocks were clear-

וַיִּצָא מֵאֵמָב וְהָיָה בְּכָל־יָחֵם הַצֹּאן הַמְקֻשְׁרוֹת וְשֵׁם
 יַעֲקֹב אֶת־הַמְקֻלּוֹת לְעֵינֵי הַצֹּאן
 בְּרֹהֲטִים לִיחְמָנָה בַּמְקֻלּוֹת: וּבִהְעֵטִיף
 הַצֹּאן לֹא יִשָּׂים וְהָיָה הָעֵטָפִים לְלֶבָן

ly segregated and Laban would have no cause for complaint that Jacob was using his own animals to promote the birth of animals with a similar tendency among Laban's flocks (*Chizkuni*).

41-42. [Jacob did not apply these measures indiscriminately. He set up the peeled rods only when the early-bearing sturdier flocks were about to mate, thus securing the hardest animals for himself.]

41. בְּכָל־יָחֵם הַצֹּאן הַמְקֻשְׁרוֹת — *Whenever the early-bearing* [i.e. sturdier (*Ramban*; *Lekach Tov*)] *animals became stimulated*.

I.e., were about to mate in their prime season (*Radak*).

Understanding Jacob's procedure outlined in these two verses requires familiarity with the premise that sheep drop two litters annually: They mate in *Nissan* [=March-April] and have a litter in *Av* [=July-August]; they mate again in *Tishrei* [=September-October] and have a litter in *Adar* [=February-March].

Ramban [v. 37] explains that those *early-bearing sheep*, i.e. those who mated in *Nissan*, were the *sturdier sheep* referred to here. It was

only with *these* sheep that Jacob resorted to the rods [to assure himself a sturdy flock]; with the *weaker, later-bearing sheep* who mated in *Tishrei* he did nothing since setting up the rods *twice* a year would have aroused the animosity of Laban's shepherds. Furthermore, had Jacob *always* resorted to this practice, Laban would have been left with absolutely no flocks whatsoever.

Ramban then cites *Radak's* father that in the *first year* of the agreement Jacob did not resort to this device, as many spotted animals were born to him that year by God's blessing [see 31:12]. It was only when these newborn sheep that were *already rightfully his* under the terms of the arrangement were ready to mate that he used the rods to influence them to produce similarly spotted offspring which would *remain his*. At the same time, Laban would be prevented from claiming that Jacob had stolen his flock which Laban certainly would have done had Jacob's animals produced monochromed lambs and kids.⁽¹⁾

The ambiguous term *מְקֻשְׁרוֹת* occurs in this form only here in all of Scripture. *Rashi* follows *Onkelos* who renders it *בְּכִירוֹת*, the *firstlings*, i.e. the *early-bearing sheep* [or: sheep who bore for the first time (*Lekach Tov*)]. He cites *Menachem* who relates the

1. [The above is the only mention made by the early commentators regarding the status of the offspring of those spotted animals born to Jacob. Apparently, even *their* offspring would not automatically belong to Jacob unless they, too, were spotted. The monochrome offspring of even the spotted animals born under the terms of the deal would revert to Laban even if only for the purpose of maintaining visible proof of Jacob's compliance.]

Accordingly, *Ramban* continues, the animals referred to in our verse are those *firstlings* born to Jacob's by God's blessing: It was only with *these* that Jacob used the rods; with the *weaker ones*, i.e., those of Laban's flocks not granted him by God's blessing, he did not use this device, thereby leaving their offspring to Laban.

41-42 ⁴¹ Whenever the early-bearing animals became stimulated, Jacob would place the rods in the runnels, in full view of the flock to stimulate them among the rods. ⁴² But when the sheep were late-bearing he would not emplace. Thus, the late-bearing ones went to Laban and the early-bearing ones to Jacob.

word to קשרים, conspirators, in II Sam. 15:13, the connotation being those sheep who banded together [=conspired] in order to accelerate their pregnancy [i.e., become early-bearing sheep.]

Ibn Ezra defines these sheep as those which mate in Nissan. Ramban, although agreeing with Onkelos and Rashi that it refers to the stronger, early-bearing sheep, suggests that the phrase refers to the virile and potent sheep who constantly desire to mate and are, consequently, always קשורים, bound up, following the females.

לִיְחַמְּנָה בַּמְּקוֹלוֹת — To stimulate them [i.e., cause them to mate (Ibn Ezra)] among the rods.

[See Rashi to v. 38 s.v. וַיַּחְמְנָה.]

42. וּבְהִעָשִׂיתָ הַצֶּאֱן לֹא יוֹשִׁים — But when the sheep were late-bearing he would not emplace.

[I.e., he would not set up the rods before the late-bearing, feeble, flocks. Accordingly, they did not produce spotted or speckled offspring.]

These were the sheep who bore late, as Onkelos renders וּבְלִקְיֻשׁוֹת [from לַקֵּשׁ, late, slow, retarded (compare the term מְלַקֵּשׁ, late rain).] Menachem, relating it to the root עָטַף, wrapping, figuratively explains this as referring to those

animals who are 'well-wrapped in their furs' and do not desire — until later — to be 'warmed' by the males (Rashi).

Ibn Ezra, too, defines these as those sheep who mated in Tishrei. They and their offspring are less sturdy, and the term עָטַף has the meaning of feeble, languish, weak [cf. Psalms 107:5; Lam. 2:19].

According to Radak's interpretation, cited by Ramban above, this was the season that Laban usually visited the newborn flocks. Jacob did not want him to see the rods even though they were set up in front of Jacob's flocks only, since Laban would accuse him of using such measures among all the flocks.

וְהָיָה הַעֲטֻפִּים לִלְבָּן וְהַקְּשָׁרִים לְיַעֲקֹב — Thus, the late-bearing ones went to Laban and the early-bearing ones to Jacob.

For, in effect, the late-bearing feeble ones who were not exposed to the peeled rods did not give birth to spotted offspring. The early bearing ones as well as their spotted offspring born under the influence of Jacob's rods, remained with Jacob (Ramban).¹¹

Summary: The Validity of Jacob's Actions

1. Upon concluding the narrative of Jacob's dealings with Laban, one is struck by this question: How could the patriarch who epitomizes אֱמֶת, truth have stooped to such scheming? It is axiomatic, however, that since Jacob does represent the attribute of truth, his behavior must be understood in that light. Furthermore, the above arrangement lasted for six years, yet we find nowhere that Laban ever accused Jacob of cheating him, even in 31:26-30 when his ire was aroused. As outlined in the Overview, precisely because Jacob had to maintain his in-

וַיֵּצֵא מִן הַקְּשָׁרִים לְעֵקֶב: וַיִּפְרֹץ הָאִישׁ מְאֹד
מִן הָאִישׁ לֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ צֶאֱן רַבּוֹת וּשְׂפָחוֹת
וְעֶבְדִּים וּגְמָלִים וְחִמְרִים: וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶת־
דְּבַר בְּנֵי־לֶבֶן לֵאמֹר לָקַח יַעֲקֹב אֶת כָּל־
אֲשֶׁר לְאֶבְיָנוּ וּמֵאֲשֶׁר לְאֶבְיָנוּ עָשָׂה אֶת־

43. The result of all the above is that Jacob prospered immensely:

וַיֵּצֵא מִן הַקְּשָׁרִים מִן הָאִישׁ מְאֹד — *The man became exceedingly prosperous* [lit. spread out exceedingly; or: became exceedingly strong (as Rashi explains the verb פָּרַץ in 28:14).]

As noted in the commentary to 28:14 the verb פָּרַץ in its most literal sense connotes *breaking forth* through narrow confines, or *increasing numerically* [Radak and Ibn Ezra].

— The connotation here is that

tegrity, he was tested by being thrown in with the arch-swindler of the era. Nevertheless, we must seek to understand the basis for his actions.

□ As viewed by the Sages, Jacob's action was necessary to defend himself against the trickery of Laban whose constant changes of the terms of the arrangement would have made it impossible for Jacob to earn any offspring for himself. Jacob's resort to trickery was permissible in consonance with the teaching of the Sages [Megillah 13b citing Psalms 18:27]: עֲיִיבָהּ תַּחֲתָיָהּ, תַּחֲתָיָהּ וְעִיבָהּ תַּחֲתָיָהּ, *with the trustworthy act trustingly and with the crooked act perversely*. Compare Rashi's comment on 29:12 citing the Midrash: Jacob said to Rachel, 'Should your father wish to deceive me, I am his brother [i.e., his match] in deceit; but should he treat me fairly, I am the righteous Rebecca's son and I know how to reciprocate his righteousness' (Mizrahi v. 39).

□ Ramban [to v. 37] maintains that once they had agreed that certain mutations would belong to Jacob, Jacob had a right to seek to ensure such births and promote his interests. It is even possible that the procedure was distinctly stipulated for use only during the Nisan mating season [see comm. to v. 42].

□ Radak, citing his father, maintains that in the first year God blessed Jacob with an abundant flock of speckled and spotted animals without resort to peeled rods. It was *after* the vision of the angel [31:32; see comm. above, v. 37] that Jacob set up the peeled rods in front of his *own* spotted animals so that they in turn should produce similar ones. [According to this opinion Jacob did not have to do this because even the monochrome sheep born to Jacob's own speckled flock would remain Jacob's, nevertheless] Jacob used this device to prevent Laban from accusing him of stealing his monochrome animals, as Laban would undoubtedly have done had he discovered such offspring among Jacob's separated flocks. [See Or Zarua cited in footnote end of v. 35.]

□ Many commentators cited in the commentary point to the Providential aspect of this episode, and maintain that the mutants were merely the result of a miracle designed to protect Jacob from Laban's trickery. The rods were merely a symbolic manifestation of the miracle which Jacob understood after the vision described in 31:32, designed to disguise the miraculous aspect and clothe it in an aura of natural phenomena. Compare Elisha's instructions to Gehazi [II Kings 4:29] to lay his staff on the face of the child [as if the staff would be effective in reviving the child]. Similarly, as noted in the footnote to verse 38, the rods did not *bring forth* the miracle, but merely *accentuated* it, for the use of the rods made it plain that the birth of the mutants was not merely a freakish, but natural event. Only God can cause spotted cattle to be born (see Mizrahi v. 39).

Jacob, himself, later attributed his success to Providence. When he said [31:5] *the God of my father was with me*, he implied that, were it not for the miracle and Divine assistance, the matter could not have been accomplished merely with the peeled rods. He further suggested this when he said [ibid. v. 9]: *God has taken away your father's cattle and given them to me* (R' Bachya).

30 ⁴³ The man became exceedingly prosperous and he
43 attained fecund flocks, maidservants and servants,
camels and donkeys.

31 ¹ Then he heard the words of Laban's sons saying,
1 'Jacob has taken all that belonged to our father,
and from that which belonged to our father he amas-

his wealth metaphorically caused him to burst forth through barriers to the extent that the region could no longer contain him: he outgrew his premises (*Radak*).

— He exceeded the limitations to prosperity usually associated with shepherding (*Sforno*).

צאן רבות — Fecund flocks.

I.e. flocks which were prolific and which multiplied more than any other (*Tanchuma*; *Rashi*).

Rashi's interpretation takes רבות as a participle: flock which multiplied. He does not

render it as an adjective: many flocks, because the numerical abundance is already suggested by the prosperity mentioned earlier in the verse (*Mizrachi*); furthermore, had it been an adjective the phrase should have read צאן רב (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*).

The feminine form רבות is used because it describes the fecundity of the animals, and it is the females who bear (*Radak*).

ושפחות וַעֲבָדִים — [And] maidservants and servants, etc.

All of which he bought by selling his sheep at a high price (*Rashi*).

XXXI

1. Jacob's flight from Charan.

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶת־דִּבְרֵי בְנֵי־לָבָן — Then [lit. and] he [Jacob] heard the words of Laban's sons.

Jacob heard their slanderous remarks against him, caused by their jealousy of him (*Sforno*).^[1]

[The implication is either that Jacob overheard their taunts which were spoken between themselves, or that they complained directly to him.]

This, too, was part of God's Providential plan. The time had come for Jacob to depart, so God precipitated Jacob's discomfort (*Malbim*).

That Laban had sons is already noted above in 30:35. (*Ibn Ezra*; [see also *Rashi* *ibid.* v. 27]).

לָקַח יַעֲקֹב אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיו — Jacob has taken all that belonged to our father.

— I.e., he even took over the devious ways of our father, and used our father's own methods to outwit him (*Kli Yakar*).

וּמֵאֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיו עָשָׂה אֶת־כָּל־הַכֶּבֶד הַזֶּה — And from that which belonged to our father he amassed all this wealth [lit. honor].

'He would never have attained such wealth had he not resorted to his trickery, or if he had con-

1. Why does the Torah first mention the attitude of the sons and then of the father?

Possibly Laban's arrogance toward his father [see 24:50, 55] was avenged by his sons' behavior toward him; just as Laban gave the orders in Bethuel's household, so his sons now decided how to treat Jacob (*R' Hirsch*).

וַיֵּצֵא לַאֲבִירָה
ב כָּל-הַכֶּבֶד הַזֶּה: וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶת-פָּנָיו לָבָן
ג וְהָנָה אֵינָנו עִמּוֹ כְּתַמּוֹל שְׁלֹשׁ: וַיֹּאמֶר
ה יְהוָה אֶל-יַעֲקֹב שׁוּב אֶל-אֶרֶץ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ
וּלְמִוְלַדְתֶּךָ וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ: וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב

centrated on tending our father's flocks properly.' But their taunts were unjustified, as we soon learn (*Haamek Davar*).

The verb *עָשָׂה*, lit. *made*, means in this context *gathered, amassed*, as in *I Samuel 14:48*: וַיַּעַשׂ חִיל, *he gathered troops* (*Rashi*); cf. *Rashi* to 12:5.

Onkelos renders the word in the sense of *acquired*.

The translation of כָּבֵד, lit. *honor*, as *wealth* [*Onkelos*: נִכְסֵיךָ] follows the *Midrash* which explains the word in our context as referring to gold and silver. The word has the same meaning in *Nachum 2:10* [where it is also spelled 'defectively' as כָּבֵד without the *vav* וּ (כְּבוֹד) (*Tanchuma*)]¹¹

Wealth is figuratively referred to by the term *honor*, *Yafeh Toar* observes, because people tend to honor wealthy men.

Rashbam cites the use of the adjective כָּבֵד, *laden*, denoting abundance of wealth, in 13:2. [See *comm.* there.]

This monetary wealth came to Jacob from selling his unusually fecund flocks, as noted in 30:43 (*Tanchuma*).

2. [The dissatisfaction at Jacob's prosperity is visible in Laban's disposition]:

1. The *Vilna Gaon* points out that the interpretation of citing 'honor' as wealth, (*Nachum 2:10*) is contradicted by *Pirkei Avos* [6:3] where the Sages proclaimed:

אֵין כְּבוֹד אֶלָּא תוֹרָה, 'honor' refers to nothing but *Torah*.
He explains that the *Torah* generally uses the 'full' spelling for כְּבוֹד – with a ו – implying that it refers to a full measure of honor. Such honor can mean only *Torah*: the epitome of greatness. In our verse and in *Nachum*, it is spelled defectively, indicating that the 'honor' is deficient in nature. Such defective honor is the one given because of wealth.

[*Reb Avie Gold* notes that both our passage and the one in *Nachum* reflect a particular philosophy. In our verse, Laban's sons are speaking. In *Nachum*, the subject of the prophecy is Nebuchadnezzar. To such people, the only true 'honor' is the amassing of more and more wealth.]

וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶת-פָּנָיו לָבָן – *Jacob also noticed* [i.e. perceived, scrutinized] *Laban's disposition* [lit. *face*].

The crafty Laban's displeasure is more internalized than that of his brash sons, but he cannot completely *disguise* his frustration. A man's face is the barometer of his feelings (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

According to *Sforno*: It was apparent from Laban's face that he had accepted his sons' vilifications.

וְהָנָה אֵינָנו עִמּוֹ כְּתַמּוֹל שְׁלֹשׁ – *That, behold, it was not toward* [lit. *with*] *him as in earlier days* [lit. *as yesterday* (and) *the day before*].

A mere look at Laban's face made it apparent that he was not as well disposed toward Jacob as he had been formerly (*Radak*).

According to *Onkelos*, then, the subject is Laban's face: *Its expression was not with him*, etc.

3. **HASHEM** commands Jacob to depart.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-יַעֲקֹב – *And HASHEM said to Jacob*.

This prophetic revelation came to Jacob while he was still reflecting on

31 *sed all this wealth.'* ² Jacob also noticed Laban's dis-
2-3 *position that behold, it was not toward him as in*
earlier days. ³ And HASHEM said to Jacob, 'Return to
the land of your fathers and to your native land and I
will be with you.'

their changed attitude (*Radak*).

Jacob ignored the taunts of Laban's sons because they were children. But when he perceived a difference in Laban's attitude, he grew worried and God appeared to him to reassure him (*Tz'ror HaMor*).

Radak suggests that this revelation came to Jacob through the medium of an angel who, as God's emissary, delivers His message in first person.

[Comp. the angel's address to Hagar in 16:10 and *Rashi* to 18:10. This concept is explained in the footnote to 22:13, page 804. Perhaps *Radak's* comment is based on the premise that the presence of the Shechinah is limited to the Holy Land, or, more probably, this is the same vision given by Jacob in more detail further in v. 11 where it is specifically attributed to an angel (cf. *Chizkuni*). See also *Sforno* to 35:9.]

שוב אל-ארץ אבותיך ולמולדתך —
Return to the land of your fathers
and to your native land.

[The term מולדת is familiarly translated *birthplace*, or, as we translate it here, *native land*. In 12:1 (see pp. 426-7) we translate it *relatives*: According to *Abarbanel*, there, it signifies: 'your loved ones among whom you were born and raised.' Since Jacob would be returning only to Isaac and Rebecca (who was still living at this time), *native land* is preferable in our context.]

Return to the land of your fathers — your father waits for you; your 'moledes' [homiletically: 'she who bore you'] — your mother — waits

for you; and I will be with you — I, too, am waiting (*Midrash*).

וְאֵהְיָ עִמָּךְ — And I will be with you.

This expression is an explicit affirmation of Providence watching over the details of man's various activities (*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:18; [see *comm.* to 28:15]).

— I will protect you from all harm during the journey (*Sforno*).

[The continuity of the verse is:]

There — when you return to the land of your fathers — *I will be with you*, but [here], while you are still associated with the unclean [Laban], My Shechinah will not rest upon you (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

— Therefore, My Providential protection appears to have been removed from you in *this* place, as evidenced by the disfavor of Laban and his sons. This I did to provoke your departure to the land of your fathers where I will once again protect you (*Malbim*).

That God promised to be with him was meant to imply that, contrary to Rebecca's fears for Jacob's safety, God would protect him from Esau (*Haamek Davar*).

4. Jacob summons his wives and explains his position to them. Jacob knew how difficult it is for people to uproot themselves from their home. Women find this especially difficult. He therefore consulted with his wives to convince them of the dishonesty of their wicked father, and to impress upon them

וַיִּקְרָא לְרַחֵל וּלְלֵאָה הַשָּׂדֶה אֶל־צֹאנוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן רֵאָה אָנֹכִי אֶת־פָּנַי אֲבִיכֶן כִּי־אֵינֶנּוּ אֵלַי כְּתִמָּל שְׁלֶשֶׁם וְאֵלֵהִי אֲבִי הֲיֵה עִמָּדִי: וְאַתָּנָה יִדְעָתֶן בִּי בְכָל־כַּחֲצִי עֲבַדְתִּי אֶת־אֲבִיכֶן: וְאֲבִיכֶן הִתֵּל בִּי

the necessity of an expedient departure since only God's protection had prevented Laban from harming him until now (*Tz'ror HaMor*).^[1]

Jacob sent. — יושלח יעקב.

According to *Targum Yonasan*, Jacob sent the fleet-footed Naftali to summon them. He intended to carry out the divine command without a moment's delay (*R' Munk*).

And summoned [lit. called to] Rachel and [to] Leah. — וַיִּקְרָא לְרַחֵל וּלְלֵאָה

Rachel is mentioned first for she was the *mainstay of the household* [i.e. his principal wife; see on 29:31 s.v. וַיִּרְחַל עֲקֵרָה], since it was for her sake that Jacob became associated with Laban. Even Leah's descendants, as represented by Boaz and his court who though

they were descendants of Leah's son Judah, gave precedence to Rachel when they said [*Ruth* 4:11]: *May HASHEM make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and like Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel* (*Rashi*).

According to *Chizkuni*, Jacob did not have to summon Bilhah and Zilpah for they assisted him with his flocks and were already in the field.

To the field, to his flock. — הַשָּׂדֶה אֶל־צֹאנוֹ

I.e., that they should come to him in the field where he was tending his flocks (*Radak*).

To the field where he could converse without being overheard since, as people say, 'the walls have ears' (*Midrash Aggadah*).^[2]

Ibn Caspi comments that Jacob summoned them to *his own* flock

1. Jacob first presented his wives with a frightening picture of their status with Laban, and only then did he tell them that God had commanded him to return to Canaan. They responded similarly: only after emphasizing their inferior status with Laban did they say 'whatever God has said to you, do.' This was להקטין את הנסיון כדי, to diminish the severity of the test.

Generally it is considered more meritorious to overcome severe tests to one's faith, rather than to diminish them, however, as the masters of *mussar* teach, there are times when one should seek ways to strengthen his resolve by introducing inducements to do the right thing or by advancing arguments to diminish the apparent severity of the test.

Furthermore, it is basic to an understanding of any God-given test that it is calibrated to correspond to the person being tested. Therefore, a fair challenge to one person will be too difficult or too simple for most others. God's command here was given to Jacob — he needed no further inducement. But for Rachel and Leah, further arguments may have been needed. (For a fuller discussion of the nature of tests see *Overview — The Akeidah*, p. 599).

2. R' Akiva says, For three things I like the Medes: When they cut meat they cut it only on the table [and not simply while holding it; see *Maharsha*]; when they kiss [as a sign of respect] they kiss only on the back of the hand [and not on the mouth (*Rashi*; cf. *Maharsha*)]; and

⁴ Jacob sent and summoned Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock, ⁵ and said to them, 'I have noticed that your father's disposition is not toward me as in earlier days; but the God of my father was with me. ⁶ Now you have known that it was with all my might that I served your father, ⁷ yet your father mocked

for it was the subject of his conflict with Laban. As *Haamek Davar* explains: Jacob summoned them specifically while he was tending his own flocks rather than Laban's, so Laban's shepherds should not become suspicious.

5. It is quite evident from your father's appearance that he is not as well-disposed toward me as before ...

וְאֵלֵהי אָבִי הָיָה עִמִּי — But [lit. and] the God of my father was with me.

Although your father resents my success, his animosity toward me is unwarranted. My prosperity was not the result of my having stolen anything from him; God has been with me. He has given me everything I possess (*Rashbam*; *Sforno*).

Here Jacob emphasizes the role of Providence in his success, making no mention of the peeled rods. Only God's role in the miraculous result was the determining factor. This is

further manifested in the dream Jacob reveals in v. 10 (*R' Bachya*; see footnote to 30:42).

6. Jacob reiterates Laban's repeated ingratitude for his faithful service:

וְאַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ — Now you have known.

[The sense of this form is: If anyone knows, it is you, my dear wives ...]

בִּי בְכָל־כֹּחִי עָבַדְתִּי אֶת אָבִיךָ — That it was with all my might that I served your father.

— As Jacob says below [v. 40]: By day scorching heat consumed me, and frost by night; my sleep drifted from my eyes (*Radak*).^[1]

7. וְאִבִּיךָ הִתֵּל בִּי — Yet [lit. and] your father mocked me.

— By taking advantage of me (*Ibn Caspi*).

The translation *mocked* follows *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* who relate the word to its use in *I Kings* 18:27: וַיִּהְיֶה בָהֶם אֵלֵיהֶוּ, *Elijah mocked*

when they take counsel, they do so only in the field [(secluded from all passers-by) for, as people say, 'the walls have ears' (*Rashi*)] (*Midrash*; *Berachos* 8b).

[Cf. *Aggadas Esther* 4:6 that Hasach went out to Mordechai unto the city square where no one could spy on them and overhear their conversation.]

1. Just as an employer is prohibited from depriving the poor worker of his wage or withholding it from him when it is due, so is a worker prohibited from depriving the employer of the benefit of his work by idling away his time, a little here and a little there, thus wasting the whole day deceitfully.

Indeed, a worker must be very punctual in the matter of time, seeing that the Sages were so solicitous in this matter that they exempted a worker from saying the fourth benediction of *Bircas HaMazon*. A worker must work with all his strength, as the righteous Jacob said, *It was with all my might that I served your father*, and he received his reward for his loyalty in this world too as it is written [30:43]: *And the man prospered exceedingly* (*Rambam*, *Hil. S'chirus* 13:7).

וַיֹּצֵא לַאֲחֵי-
וְהַחֲלֹף אֶת-מִשְׁכַּרְתִּי עֶשְׂרֵת מִנִּים וְלֹא-
נָתַנּוּ אֱלֹהִים לְהִרְעַע עֲמָדִי: אִם-כֹּה יֹאמֶר
נִקְדִּים יִהְיֶה שְׂכָרְךָ וְיִלְדוּ כָל-הַצֹּאֵן
נִקְדִּים וְאִם-כֹּה יֹאמֶר עֲקָדִים יִהְיֶה
שְׂכָרְךָ וְיִלְדוּ כָל-הַצֹּאֵן עֲקָדִים: נִינָל
יֵ, אֱלֹהִים אֶת-מִקְנֶה אֲבִיכֶם וַיִּתֶּן-לִי: וַיְהִי

at them. They derive it from the root החלל.

HaRechasim Leibik'ah gives it the sense of: tried to outwit me; deceive or cheat. Citing this connotation in Job 13:8, Heidenheim goes to great lengths to assert that the root is תול and the prefix ה denotes the hiphil (as הלל=חלל) in the sense of Psalms 137:3 ותוללני, our tormentors. Accordingly, the verb here means (your father) tormented me. R' Hirsch derives the verb similarly, but interprets it to mean let down in ruin (comp. חל, a heap of ruins), hence: deceive, renege on promises.

וְהַחֲלֹף אֶת מִשְׁכַּרְתִּי עֶשְׂרֵת מִנִּים —
And [he] changed my wage a
hundred (times) [lit. ten tens].

[I.e., Laban made attempt after attempt to alter the conditions to serve his own ends.]

Actually, R' Munk notes, the Torah alludes to only one such example of Laban's deceit [see 30:35]. However, as Ramban emphasizes, there must have been many such instances even though the Torah does not enumerate them. This is evidenced by Jacob's direct reproach to Laban regarding his constantly changing the wage in verse 41, a reproach which Laban did not deny. It is often the case that the Torah does not supply all details. For example in the episode of the *dudaim* [30:14ff] we are not told explicitly that Leah actually gave the *dudaim* to Rachel [although it is later implicit in v. 16 that she did so].

The translation of עֶשְׂרֵת מִנִּים as a hundred times follows the Midrashic

view cited by Rashi that the term *monim*, related to *minyan*, literally means a unit of ten. Hence the phrase עֶשְׂרֵת מִנִּים, *ten monim*, means that Laban changed his conditions one hundred times [=ten times ten.]

Sifsei Chachomim [in the unabridged editions printed with Mizrahi and Gur Aryeh] gives a detailed calculation of the one hundred possibilities of changes in the terms.

Ibn Ezra relates the word מִנִּים to the verb *count*, interpreting: *ten times*, [lit. *ten counts*]; thus, Laban deceived Jacob ten times, not a hundred. [Rashbam renders similarly as does Onkelos, וַיִּמְנֵן.] He also offers that 'ten' might be used as a round number rather than an exact total.

Radak asserts similarly, that *ten* is idiomatic and only signifies 'many,' as it does in Lev. 26:26. The number *ten* is used in this sense since it represents the transition point from single digits to multiple units.

He then cites his father, R' Yosef Kimchi, that it means *exactly ten*. Jacob worked for Laban a total of six years under this bargain. In the first year, when Laban saw that Jacob produced prodigious flocks for himself, he changed the terms; during each of the subsequent four years he changed the terms twice (once after each of Jacob's successful mating seasons), making a total of nine times in the first five years; and once more in the final year before this confrontation took place and Jacob finally fled.

According to *Midrash Maayan Ganim* cited in *Torah Sheleimah* 31:17 the number ten represents the fact that there were a total of five categories:

31 , me and changed my wage a hundred times. But God
8-9 did not permit him to harm me. ⁸ If he would stipulate: "Spotted ones shall be your wages," then the entire flock bore spotted ones; and if he would stipulate: "Ringed ones shall be your wages," then the entire flock bore ringed ones. ⁹ Thus, God took away your father's livestock, and gave them to me.

עקרים, ringed; נקרים, spotted; בדרים, checkered [see further v. 10]; טלואים, speckled; and חום, brownish. In effect Laban changed the conditions regarding each of these five categories twice: first when originally offering, and then when withdrawing that particular category. Thus, there were a total of ten changes.

ואת — ולא נתנו אלהים להרע עמרי
God did not permit [lit. give] him to harm me [lit. to do evil with me.]

That is, none of Laban's attempts to cheat Jacob succeeded, because God was always generous to Jacob and frustrated Laban's plans, as Jacob proceeds to show (Ramban).

[See Rashi to 20:6 concerning this use of give with the figurative meaning grant the power to do something, hence: permit.]

אם כה יאמר נקרים יהיה שכרך. 8.
וילדו כל הצאן נקרים — If he would stipulate [lit. if he would say thus]: 'Spotted ones shall be your wages,' then the entire flock bore spotted ones; and if he would stipulate [lit. if he would say thus]: 'Ringed ones shall be your wages,' then the entire flock bore ringed ones.

Although the original agreement provided that three categories of mutations would go to Jacob, Laban constantly refused to give more than one mutation. Even that single one, he would change each year. But the flocks would always bear the kind finally allotted to Jacob (Ramban).^[1]

וַיִּצֶל אֱלֹהִים אֶת־מִקְנֵה אַבְרָם. 9.
וַיִּתְּרֵלִי — Thus, God took away your father's livestock, and gave them to me.

It was clearly by God's approval that Jacob's wealth increased in the face of Laban's every deceitful effort to frustrate the deal, and not by virtue of Jacob's resort to the peeled rods (Ramban).

The term מִקְנֵה from the root קנה, literally means possessions, property (so R' Hirsch); it therefore has the connotation of cattle, livestock, which in Biblical times was man's most important possession (Ibn Janach).

[On וַיִּצֶל, took away, salvaged, literally connoting set aside, see Rashi on וַיִּצֶל in v. 16.]

R' Hirsch, interpreting the word as rescued, salvaged, comments: God gave part of your father's fortune to me in

1. The Midrash expounds in this context that when Laban saw the sheep pregnant he would constantly change the conditions, and God would cause a miracle, making the unborn lambs conform to whatever Laban would stipulate.

Therefore the expression used here is not in the past tense: אם כה יאמר, if he stipulated, but in the future imperfect: If he would stipulate. God anticipated Laban's future demands and caused the unborn sheep to conform to his ultimate condition.

[The implication, as Ramban concludes, is that it was God's intervention in the face of Laban's every deceitful effort to cheat Jacob, and not the natural effect of the peeled rods that caused Jacob's success and prosperity.]

בַּעַת יָחַם הַצֹּאֵן וְאִשָּׁא עֵינַי וְאָרָא
בְּחִלּוֹם וְהִנֵּה הָעֵתָדִים הָעֲלִים עַל-הַצֹּאֵן
יֵא עֲקָדִים נִקְדִּים וּבִרְדִּים: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי
מִלֶּאךָ הָאֱלֹהִים בְּחִלּוֹם יַעֲקֹב וְאָמַר
יִי הִנְנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂא-נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה כָּל-
הָעֵתָדִים הָעֲלִים עַל-הַצֹּאֵן עֲקָדִים
נִקְדִּים וּבִרְדִּים כִּי רָאִיתִי אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר
יִי לָבָן עָשָׂה לָךְ: אֲנֹכִי הָאֵל בֵּית-אֵל אֲשֶׁר

order to *save* it from falling into other hands. Or, whatever I have of your father's possessions was *saved* from falling into *his* hands, because it is rightfully mine in return for my labor. Moreover, I *earned* it with my work; it was not a dowry which is an unearned windfall.

10. [Jacob reveals for the first time that he had been shown in a prophetic dream that the birth of parti-colored young was God's compensation for Laban's ill-treatment of him].

יָהִי בַעַת יָחַם הַצֹּאֵן — [And] it [once] happened at the mating time of the flock [lit. at the time the flock would become heated].

This dream had occurred at the beginning of the six-year period, after Laban began changing Jacob's wages. This is indicated by the angel's reference [v. 12] to *all that Laban is doing* [present tense] to you (Ramban; see v. 13).

וְאִשָּׁא עֵינַי וְאָרָא בְּחִלּוֹם — That [lit. and] I raised my eyes and saw in a dream:

[A form of prophetic experience. On the significance of dreams as a vehicle of prophecy, see *comm.* to 28:12.]

— וְהִנֵּה הָעֵתָדִים הָעֲלִים עַל הַצֹּאֵן [And] Behold! The he-goats that mounted the flock.

Laban had removed all of these he-goats so that flocks under Jacob should not bear similar offspring [see 30:35], but angels took them from his sons' flocks and returned them to Jacob's flocks (Rashi).

The word *Behold!* [as noted also in the *comm.* to 28:13] emphasizes that Jacob's dream was not a mere fantasy; the term: *Behold*, is used only to introduce something of *substance*. The vision was an assurance that Laban's capricious changes would not harm Jacob, and that his flocks would bear offspring of whatever coloration Jacob would need (Ramban).

The Hebrew terms for he-goats: *תִּישִׁים* (30:35) and *עֲקָדִים* are synonymous (Radak). Both are rendered by *Onkelos*: *תִּישָׁא, he-goats*.

Ramban adds that rams (male sheep) as well as he-goats are included in this term. It refers to all the adults in the flock; and figuratively, as well, to leaders among men, as in *Isaiah* 14:9: *the chieftains (עֲזָרִי) of the earth*.

— עֲקָדִים נִקְדִּים וּבִרְדִּים — Were ringed, spotted, and checkered.

The dream did not portray the he-goats as being composed of a conglomeration of all the above.

31 ¹⁰ It once happened at the mating time of the flock
10-13 that I raised my eyes and saw in a dream — Behold!
 The he-goats that mounted the flock were ringed,
 spotted, and checkered. ¹¹ And an angel of God said
 to me in the dream, "Jacob!" And I said, "Here I
 am." ¹² And he said, "Raise your eyes, if you please,
 and see that all the he-goats mounting the flocks are
 ringed, spotted, and checkered, for I have seen all
 that Laban is doing to you. ¹³ I am the God of Bethel

Rather, the flock was first shown him to be *ringed*; later it was portrayed as *spotted*, and finally *checkered* (Ramban).

[On the first two terms, see 30:32-35.]

The term *בָּרָדִים* occurs only here throughout Scripture. The translation *checkered* seems to be most faithful to Rashi who cites *Onkelos'* rendering *פָּצִיחַ* [lit. open] which he explains as *faissie* in Old French [= *faisceau* (?), things linked, checkered]: It refers to a white streak going around their body composed of open, interlinked spots.

Targum Yonasan renders the word: *גְּבִיחִין* (גיורין, their backs were white).

The *בָּרָדִים* here are in place of the *טְלוּאִים*, speckled, of 30:32. The term *בָּרָדִים* signifies that their blotches were white related to *בָּכָר*, hail.

Minchah Belulah explains that the *בָּרָדִים* were in contrast to the *נְקֻדִּים*, spotted ones. The latter were white with black spots; the former were black with white spots.

11. וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי מַלְאָךְ הָאֱלֹהִים בְּחִלּוֹם — וַיֵּצֵב — And an angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob!'

In enumerating the eleven degrees of prophecy, Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* 2:45 states that the sixth level of prophecy is communication from an angel in a dream, as in our verse, and that it is a form of prophecy 'which applies to most of the prophets.

וְהִנְנִי — Here I am.

Such is the response of the pious. The expression denotes both humility and readiness (Rashi 22:2).

12. שֶׁאֵינָא עֵינְיךָ וְרֹאא כָּל הָעֲתִידִים ... — Raise your eyes, if you please, and see that all the he-goats mounting the flocks are ringed, spotted and checkered.

As noted above [see v. 10], this was God's implicit assurance that they would bear similar offspring, and that Jacob need no longer resort to the use of peeled rods (Ramban).

According to R' Bachya [to 30:38] however, the intent is to the contrary: Jacob understood that the angel would never have instructed him to gaze upon animals while they are mating — an immodest act prohibited by Torah law as formulated in *Avodah Zarah* 2:2 — unless he were meant to draw a practical lesson from the sight. He perceived that he was being shown an impending miracle so that he would be inspired to peel the rods in order to conceal God's miraculous intervention. See footnote to 30:42.

כִּי רְאִיתִי אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר לָבָן עֹשֶׂה לָּךְ — For I have seen all that Laban is doing [present tense; see v. 10] to you.

— And accordingly I [as God's emissary] wish to assure you that all of Laban's designs against you will be rendered futile (Ramban).

מִשְׁחַת שֵׁם מִצְבֵּה אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתָּ לִּי שָׁם
נָדַר עֲתָה קוֹם צֵא מִן-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְשׁוּב
אֶל-אֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתְּךָ: וְתַעַן רָחֵל וּלְאָה
וְתֹאמַרְנָה לוֹ הֵעוֹד לָנוּ חֶלֶק וְנִחְלָה

וּצֵא
לְאֹדֶר

The angel speaks in the first-person, as he is God's emissary (*Radak*; see *comm.* to v. 3 and cross-references cited there).

13. According to *Ramban*, there were two separate dreams: the first (vs. 10-12) occurred during the early part of his six-year service, and the second (v. 13) occurred the night before Jacob related it to Rachel and Leah. Now, he told them both dreams to strengthen their resolve to leave with him, by informing them that God had caused his prosperity and that He had now commanded him to return to Canaan see footnote to v. 4). The speaker in the second dream is still the angel who, as God's emissary, speaks in the first-person.

אֲנִי הָאֵל בֵּית-אֵל — *I am the God of Bethel.*

I.e., the God Who appeared to you in Bethel [see 28:13] (*Radak*; *R' Bachya*).

— And Who there promised you My protection, assuring you that I would bring you back to that land (*Malbim*).

Since the phrase הָאֵל בֵּית אֵל is in the construct state: the God of Bethel, the definite article הָאֵל, the God, is unnecessary in Hebrew.

Rashi accordingly notes that the ה is grammatically superfluous and the passage should be interpreted as if it read אֲנִי אֵל בֵּית אֵל, *I am God of Bethel*. Similar forms are [Numbers 34:2]: הָאָרֶץ כְּנָעַן [= אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, land of Canaan]. [Also (Joshua 3:14) הָאֲרוֹן הַבְּרִית, Ark of the Covenant (*Radak*).]¹¹

Ibn Ezra interprets the phrase as being elliptic, rendering it as if it were written: אֲנִי הָאֵל, אֵל בֵּית אֵל, *I am the God [Who is the] God of Bethel*. This is similar to 2:9: עֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב נָרַע, which is interpreted as if it had an implied adjectival phrase: *The tree of knowledge, i.e., knowledge of good and bad*.

Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:27 interprets the phrase to imply: 'I am the emissary of the God of Bethel', i.e., an angel of the God Who appeared to you at Bethel. (Similarly, *Midrash HaGadol*).

אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁחַת שֵׁם מִצְבֵּה — *Where you anointed a pillar [lit. a standing stone].*

— By anointing it, you sanctified it to be an altar [cf. 28:18], just as anointing a person for kingship exalts him above the common people (*Rashi*).

אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתָּ לִּי שָׁם נָדַר — [And] where you made [lit. vowed] Me a vow.

I.e., you made a vow to God in Whose Name I (the angel) speak (*Radak*).

1. *Divrei Shaul*, however, comments that the ה serves a definite purpose. Jacob doubted that his dream was truly prophetic, because there is a general rule that prophetic revelation does not take place outside of Eretz Yisrael. Nevertheless, the Sages teach that once prophecy has begun in Eretz Yisrael, it may be continued even in other lands, as was the case with Ezekiel and Jonah [see *Moed Katan* 25a]. This, then, was the intent of God's opening statement to Jacob: I am הָאֵל, the God [i.e. in continuation of some vision] Who appeared to you in Bethel — the present vision is a continuation of that prophetic promise of your future.

where you anointed a pillar and where you made Me a vow. Now — arise, leave this land and return to your native land.”

¹⁴ Then Rachel and Leah replied and said to him, 'Have we then still a share and an inheritance in our

It is now time for you to fulfill your vow, for in saying that the place would be *God's House* [28:22] you implied thereby that you would offer sacrifices there (*Rashi*).

— And if you further delay the fulfillment of your vows, you might yet incur God's wrath [see *Eccles.* 5:5] (*Ramban*).

It is interesting to note that when God commanded Jacob to leave Charan (v. 3). He omitted mention of this vow. In any event, now that Jacob was reminded of it in his dream he felt compelled to reveal the matter of his vow to his wives, since the neglect of it could affect them. *Meshech Chochmah* cites the dictum in *Rosh Hashanah* 6a: 'Whoever leaves a vow unfulfilled, his wife dies.' Indeed, it is the *Meshech Chochmah's* opinion that delay of the vow's fulfillment was a cause in Rachel's death. [Cf. v. 32.]

עַתָּה קוּם צֵא מִן הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת — Now — arise, leave this land.

I.e., accordingly, it is time for you to depart (R' *Meyuchas*).

... I have carried out what I promised you, now it is up to you to do your part, to keep your promise — צֵא מִן הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת, leave this land. Here in Aram, the family life which God wants of you cannot develop (R' *Hirsch*).

14. Rachel and Leah consent.

וַתֵּעַן רָחֵל וּלְיָאָה — Then [lit. and] Rachel and Leah replied.

The Hebrew literally means: Then Rachel replied (singular) and Leah. Rachel answered and Leah concurred (*Rabbi*).

Cf. *Targum Yonasan*: And Rachel replied with the consent of Leah.

Rachel consented at once because she loved Jacob as dearly as he loved her [and was therefore immediately ready to follow him] (*Radak*).

[Possibly the singular form of the verb implies that they both answered in one voice, implying mutual consent. Cf. *Exodus* 10:3, *Moses and Aaron came* (וַיָּבֹאוּ, singular).]

The *Midrash* discusses the question of how Rachel answered before her older sister [see 35:19]. R' Yudan maintains that because Rachel answered before her [older] sister, she died first. R' Yosi countered that she answered first because she was summoned first. According to the latter, Rachel died first because of the curse implied in Jacob's statement to Laban [see below v. 32]: *With whomever you find your gods, he shall not live*, which was like the inadvertant command of a ruler [i.e., an unintentional prognostication].

הַעוֹר לָנוּ חֶלֶק וְנַחֲלָה בְּבֵית אָבִינוּ — Have we then still a share and an inheritance in our father's house?

— What possible reason can we have for attempting to delay your departure? Have we any hope of inheriting anything of our father's estate together with his sons? (*Rashi*).

— Since he has sons, we shall not receive any share or inheritance, for

וּיצֵא טו בְּבֵית אָבִינוּ: הֲלוֹא נִכְרִיּוֹת נִחְשְׁבָנוּ לוֹ
 לֹא/טוֹרִיחַ כִּי מִכְרָנוּ וְיֹאכֵל גַּם-אֶכּוֹל אֶת-כֶּסֶפֶנוּ:
 טז כִּי כָל-הָעֵשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר הֵצִיל אֱלֹהִים
 מֵאֲבִינוּ לָנוּ הוּא וּלְבָנֵינוּ וְעַתָּה כָּל אֲשֶׁר
 ° שְׁשִׁי יז אָמַר אֱלֹהִים אֵלֶיךָ עֲשֵׂה: ° וַיִּקֶּם יַעֲקֹב
 וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת-בָּנָיו וְאֶת-נָשָׁיו עַל-הַגְּמָלִים:
 יח וַיָּנֶה אֶת-כָּל-מִקְנֵהוּ וְאֶת-כָּל-רֶכְשׁוֹ

daughters do not inherit when there are sons (*Midrash Aggadah*).

[Regarding why they first offered these rationales and did not immediately say, 'Whatever God has said to you, do,' see footnote to v. 4.]

Some commentators treat the expression *חֶלֶק וְנַחֲלָה*, lit. *a share and an inheritance*, as a hendiadys, meaning: *an heir's portion*.

However, *R' Hirsch* perceives *חֶלֶק*, *share*, to imply: will our father give us anything now, during his lifetime, or *נַחֲלָה*, *an inheritance*, in the future? Or *HaChaim* interprets *share* – from our mother's estate, and *inheritance* – from our father's.

15. הֲלוֹא נִכְרִיּוֹת נִחְשְׁבָנוּ לוֹ כִּי מִכְרָנוּ – *Are we not considered by him as strangers? For he has sold us.*

Instead of treating us like daughters and giving us a dowry upon marriage, he treated us like strangers and sold us to you in return for your work (*Rashi*).

וְיֹאכֵל גַּם-אֶכּוֹל אֶת כֶּסֶפֶנוּ – *And [he] even totally consumed our money!*

The money we should have received upon our marriage (*Radak*).

– He withheld the wages due you for your labor (*Rashi*).

– After having used us to drive a hard bargain and extract fourteen years free service from you, it would have been no financial loss to utilize the value of your work as our dowry. Even that did not enter his

mind; whatever we earned for him, he retained! (*R' Hirsch*).

[The translation *even totally consumed* reflects the emphatic form of the Hebrew which employs the infinitive: *and he consumed also consumed*.]

16. כִּי כָל-הָעֵשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר הֵצִיל אֱלֹהִים מֵאֲבִינוּ לָנוּ הוּא וּלְבָנֵינוּ – *But, all the wealth that God has taken away from our father, belongs to us and to our children.*

The translation of the conjunction *כִּי* as *but*, follows the implication of *Rashi*. [It is similar to 18:15: *כִּי צָחַקְתָּ*, *But you laughed*, i.e. you laughed indeed, see *Rashi* there.] The meaning of our passage is: We will receive nothing of our fathers estate. However, that which God has already taken from our father [and given to you] is ours and our children's.

– Consequently there is no reason we should not accompany you right now (*Alshich*).

The word *הֵצִיל*, *taken away* literally means *set aside, separate*. [The word usually connotes *rescue*] since one [who rescues a person] thereby *separates* him from misfortune and from the enemy (*Rashi*).

Onkelos renders similarly אִפְרַשׁ, *separated*, while *Yonasan* renders רִוֵּק, *removed*, as does *Radak*: עָנָן הִסָּרָה.

– כָּל אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹהִים אֵלֶיךָ עֲשֵׂה – *Whatever God has said to you, do.*
 I.e., proceed! You do not need

31 father's house? ¹⁵ Are we not considered by him as strangers? For he has sold us and even totally consumed our money! ¹⁶ But, all the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. So now, whatever God has said to you, do.'

15-18

¹⁷ Jacob arose and lifted his children and wives onto the camels. ¹⁸ He led away all his livestock and all the wealth which he had amassed — his purchased

permission; rely only on God's words (*Sforno*).

[*Sforno* might mean either: Seeing that God has so commanded you, you do not need our permission, or you do not need *Laban's* permission.]

17. Jacob's flight.

וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת-בָּנָיו וְאֶת-נָשָׁיו עַל-הַגְּמִלִּים —
And lifted his children and [his] wives onto the camels.

Jacob gave precedence to the males over the females whereas Esau gave precedence to the women, as it is written [36:6]: and Esau took his wives and his sons (*Rashi*).

Gur Aryeh explains the different order of priority. Esau took wives only to satisfy his personal lust. The birth of children was a secondary outcome of his marriages; to him the women remained paramount. Jacob married because he was the forerunner of the Jewish nation and it was his responsibility to give birth to children; to him the children came first because they were the reason for his marriages. That Moses gave precedence to his wife over his children (*Exodus* 4:20) was because his sons were still infants who depended on their mother for all their needs. Jacob evacuated his wives across the river to escape Esau before he took his children

across (32:23), specifically because the adults could be more easily taken across the river than the weaker, less agile children. *Gur Aryeh* concludes, however, that the order of preference is material only when one plans to settle down and build a future; then one's priorities reflect his values. In the cases of Moses and of Jacob in 32:23, loading for travel is a matter of convenience, and precedence is immaterial. [Cf. *Levush*; *Maskil l'David*; *Divrei David*.]

18. וְיָהֹג אֶת-בְּלִמְקָהוּ וְאֶת-בְּלִרְבָּשׁוֹ —
He led away all his livestock and all the [lit. his] wealth which he had amassed.¹¹

Jacob purposely left in a grand manner — leading his flocks and systematically gathering all his wealth — so as not to arouse the suspicions of *Laban's* people. Anyone who saw him leaving so openly would assume that he was departing with *Laban's* full knowledge and consent. Had he gone stealthily, he would have been stamped as a fugitive (*Abarbanel*).

The translation of *livestock* מִקְנֶה [lit. acquisition] follows *R' Hirsch* who explains that when that word occurs together with רְכוּשׁ [lifeless, movable property (see *R' Hirsch* to 12:3)] it refers to living property, herds and flocks.

1. In these verse the Torah elaborates on Jacob's manner of leaving Paddan Aram, because it strikingly portends the departure of his descendants from Egyptian bondage.

Just as Jacob left with great wealth, so his descendants left Egypt בְּרֶכֶשׁ גָּדוֹל with great wealth, as God promised Abraham [15:14]. Just as *Laban* learned of Jacob's departure only after three days, so Pharaoh discovered only later הָעָם הָיָה בָּרֶכֶשׁ, that the people had fled [with no intention of returning] (*Exodus* 14:5). *Laban* pursued Jacob, who was saved because of God's intervention; Pharaoh pursued Israel which was saved by the miracle at the Sea of Reeds. Thus, this is another illustration of the principle that the events in the lives of the Patriarchs were forerunners of their children's future history (*Hoffman*; cf. *Tanchuma Lech-Lecha* 9).

וַיֵּצֵא
לְאֵוִי-טִי
אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ מִקְנֵה קַיְנֹו אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ בְּפָדָן
אֲרָם לָבוֹא אֶל-יִצְחָק אָבִיו אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן:
יט וּלְכֹן הָלַךְ לְגֹזֹז אֶת-צֹאֲנוֹ וַתִּגְנֹב רָחֵל
כ אֶת-הַתְּרָפִים אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ: וַיִּגְנֹב יַעֲקֹב

אֲרָם — His distance away from Jacob's flocks [see 30:36] (*Rashi*).
His purchased property [lit. *the purchase of his acquired property*] which he had amassed in Paddan Aram.

I.e., the slaves and maidservants, camels and donkeys which he had purchased [מקנה] with the proceeds of the sale of קנינו, his flocks [lit. his acquired property]. (Cf. *comm.* to 30:43) (*Rashi*).

[Here, *Rashi* explains that מקנה means acquisition, not livestock (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*).]

The Torah thus bears testimony that all of Jacob's wealth which he took along with him was legitimately his, i.e., possessions which he legally acquired in exchange for his own property (*Hoffmann*).

Haamek Davar perceives קנינו מקנה [lit. *the purchase of his acquired possessions*] to mean the possessions acquired by his slaves (the term קנין being applied to slaves who are themselves acquired, as in *Lev. 22:11*.) He explains that Jacob himself did not engage in bartering his flocks for wealth; this was done by his talented slaves.

לָבוֹא אֶל יִצְחָק אָבִיו אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן — To go [lit. come] to his father Isaac, to the land of Canaan.

— For it was to both that he yearned to return: his father's house, and to the Holy Land (*Haamek Davar*).

19. [And] וּלְכֹן הָלַךְ לְגֹזֹז אֶת-צֹאֲנוֹ — *Laban had gone to shear his sheep.*

— Which were pasturing under the charge of his sons, a three-day

distance away from Jacob's flocks [see 30:36] (*Rashi*).

Sheep-shearing was an occasion of festivity for the entire family as evident from *II Samuel* 13:23ff and other places in Scripture. Accordingly, since Laban was away with his entire household, the time was most opportune for Rachel to enter his house and steal his *teraphim*, and for Jacob to flee (*Haamek Davar*).

— וַתִּגְנֹב רָחֵל אֶת הַתְּרָפִים אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ — And Rachel stole the *teraphim* that belonged to her father.

— To keep him from idol-worship (*Rashi*).

Rachel's intention was noble for she said to herself: Can I depart and leave my father to worship such idols? Accordingly, the Torah records this episode (*Midrash*).

Rachel thought that her intention of weaning her father from idolatry could be accomplished by her theft. If the supposed 'gods' lacked even the power to protect themselves against thieves, how could they protect the household of their owners? (*R' Hirsch*).

— She stole them to keep them from telling Laban that Jacob wished to flee, since as implied by *Hoshea* 3:4 and *Zechariah* 10:2, they were used for divination (*Rashbam*).

Although both of the above interpretations reflect varying — and not necessarily mutually exclusive views — *Ibn Ezra* inclines to the latter reason. If her intention was to stop Laban's idol-worship, she

31 property which he had amassed in Paddan Aram — to
19 go to his father Isaac, to the land of Canaan.

¹⁹ Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole the teraphim that belonged to her father.

should have *hidden* and not taken them with her.

Among the answers offered to justify *Rashi's* interpretation is that Rachel would have attracted too much attention had she stopped to bury the *teraphim*; she therefore took them along — contemptuously placing them beneath her — and awaited a more propitious time to dispose of them (*R' Yosef Caro: Toldos Yitzchak*). According to *Gur Aryeh* she was afraid that Laban might refuse to believe Jacob's protestations that no member of his company had stolen the *teraphim*. Laban might become so vehement that she would be forced to return them in order to appease him. To prepare herself for such an eventuality, she did not destroy them.

Onkelos delicately renders the term *stole* in this verse, and next as *concealed*. [See *Nesinah laGer* who suggests that this might be the primary meaning of the verb *גנב*, and that the connotation of *steal* is therefore applied to one who conceals other people's possessions for his own selfish use, while in this case Rachel clearly took them for loftier purposes.]

• Teraphim

The etymology of this word, which occurs only in the plural, is obscure.

Ibn Janach, as does *Onkelos*, merely defines them as *images, idols*, but offers no clue to the etymology of the word. *Ramban* derives it from the root *רפה* meaning *weak* [see *Exod. 5:17*] alluding to the 'weakness' of their prognostications, as the prophet declared [*Zechariah 10:2*]: *For the teraphim have spoken vanity*. The *Zohar* interprets the word as being related to *חרף* and *חורפה*, denoting *obscenity* the term being a

contemptuous one suggesting that the *teraphim* were the objects of obscenity, and filth. [Similarly, *Tanchuma*].

The *Zohar* [cited below] suggests that the idols were made in the form of a male and female [hence the plural form of the word *teraphim*]. *Radak*, who is of the opinion that they were a kind of clock which foretold fortunes, conjectures that the plural form is used since they were composed of several tablets. *Hoffmann* explains that the form may be regarded as a majestic plural; since the *teraphim* were regarded as gods, they were referred to in the plural.

That the *teraphim* were considered *gods* is evident from verse 30 where Laban called them *my gods*. As the *Zohar* notes, Laban was a great sorcerer who practiced the occult arts, and it was by such means that he learned whatever he wished to know.

Many consider them to have been a kind of household god supposed to be the protector of the home similar to the later Roman *Penates*; they were consulted for oracular purposes (*R' Hirsch*). *Ramban* [below] suggests that not all *teraphim* mentioned in Scripture were venerated as idols.

One of the earliest descriptions of *teraphim* is found in *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 36*. [It does not appear in the *Radal* edition, however; probably the result of censorship]:

'What are *teraphim*? — They would slay a firstborn man, remove his head and soak it in salt. They would write the name of an unclean spirit on a golden plate, place it under his tongue, and set him up on a wall. They would light candles, burn incense before it and bow down to it; it would then speak to them by magic. Unto such an object, did Laban bow down. How do we know that *teraphim* speak? For it is written

וַיֹּצֵא לָאֵם
אֶת־לֵב לָכֵן הָאֲרָמִי עַל־בְּלִי הַגִּיד לוֹ כִּי
כֹה בָרַח הָיָא: וַיִּבְרַח הָיָא וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָו

[Zechariah 10:2]: the teraphim have spoken vanity. For that reason Rachel stole them so they should not tell Laban that Jacob had fled, and furthermore, to remove idolatrous worship from her father's house. [A similar description appears in Targum Yonasan, Midrash Tanchuma. See also Aruch, s.v. תרף].

[Ralbag suggests that the teraphim did not actually speak. Rather, they served as the medium by which some sort of magical, occult voice was heard. See also Ibn Ezra below.]

The Zohar maintains, however, that the teraphim did possess certain powers which were the result of magical arts. According to Rav Yehudah, these powers were implanted in the objects by making them with scrupulous adherence to the magical properties of certain times and moments for striking and for holding off. At one moment the craftsman would use his hand to beat it into shape, and at another he would relax. Hence the term *teraphim*, akin to *hereph* [relax] (II Sam. 24:16). For when the craftsman was making it, the man who knew the proper seconds and hours stood over him, saying at one moment "strike", and at the other moment: "stay". There is no other work which requires to be timed in this way. This magic idol continually uttered evil counsel, and prompted mischief, and Rachel therefore feared that it might counsel her father to do mischief to Jacob. The Teraphim were a male and a female image, and a number of ceremonies had to be performed before them before they would speak. Among these ceremonies were that the area in front of it had to be swept and cleaned. Therefore, when Rachel contemptuously sat on them [v. 34 below] they could not speak. Hence Laban delayed three days before pursuing, because he had not been told of Jacob's flight.

Ibn Ezra cites an opinion that the teraphim were bronze instruments used

for determining the time of day [so Radak]. He also cites the view of others that they were images made by astrologers, which at certain times had the power of speech. The latter is inferred from a literal interpretation of Zechariah 10:2: the teraphim spoke vanity. Radak differs from this interpretation of Zechariah; he interprets it figuratively as meaning: the teraphim instructed vanity [by magical means other than speech] [cf. Ralbag]. He offers only that they were a kind of dummy in the form of a human being which was capable of absorbing higher powers. His proof that the images were in the shape of a human is that Michal deceived David's pursuers by putting teraphim in the bed, which they mistook for David [I Samuel 19:13 ff.]

Ramban deduces from the story of Michal that not all teraphim were worshipped as idols, for if so, David would certainly not have possessed them. He follows the opinion, therefore, that they were a type of time-measuring instrument which were used to magically foretell fortunes. Men of little faith therefore venerated them as idols, and consulted them rather than God, as evidenced by such references in Scripture as Judges 17:5 and ibid. 18:5.

That Laban was a diviner, Ramban continues, is evident from his remark [above 30:27]: I have learned by divination. He came from a land of diviners [see reference in Isaiah 2:6 to land of the east which was inhabited by soothsayers and which was a center of the occult sciences. Charan, too, was in the east (29:1)]. Balaam the diviner [Laban's grandson (Midrash)] hailed from Aram [see Numbers 23:7]. Hence Laban venerated this time-measuring object of occult powers as a god.

[Note that in 30:27 Ibn Ezra maintains that Laban used his teraphim for the divination mentioned there.]

31 ²⁰ Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling
20-21 him that he was fleeing. ²¹ Thus, he fled with all he

20. וַיִּגְבֹּב יַעֲקֹב אֶת־לֵב לִלְכוֹן הָאֲרָמִי — Jacob deceived [lit. stole the heart off] Laban the Aramean.

I.e. he stole Laban's mind [i.e., deceived him]. 'Heart' is figuratively used in this sense, since the seat of the intellect [in Biblical idiom] is the heart (*Ibn Ezra*).

Cf. *Targum Yonasan*: He stole the knowledge of Laban; while *Onkelos*, as noted above s.v. וַיִּגְבֹּב רָחֵל renders: Jacob concealed from Laban.

Jacob deceived Laban by not revealing that he realized that Laban was no longer well disposed toward him [v. 2]. Jacob acted in this concealed manner because he knew that Laban was a cheat and would have taken measures to prevent Jacob's flight had his suspicions been aroused. [Therefore the Torah mentions again in this context that Laban was Aramean, which, as noted in the comm. and footnote to 25:2 is Midrashically interpreted as if it read *ramai*, rogue or cheat] (*Sforno*).

According to *Ramban* [v. 24], Laban is again referred to as the *רמאי*, cheat, to intimate in a contemptuous manner that although Laban was the 'Aramean' — who prided himself as a diviner and master of *teraphim* — he was still deceived by Jacob.

עַל־כֵּלִי הִגִּיד לוֹ כִּי בָרַח הוּא — By not telling him [lit. in that he did not tell him] that he was fleeing.

Obviously, if he would tell him, it could not be called fleeing! The intent is that Jacob never gave Laban any cause to suspect that he would ever flee (*Or HaChaim*).

— He did not tell him he was planning to depart; he fled instead (*Radak*).

[Jacob justifies his action in v. 31 (*Sforno*).]

According to *Me'am Loez* [cf. *Chomas Anach*], Jacob had duped Laban by not telling him when he first arrived הוא בָּרַח הוּא, that he was a fugitive from his brother Esau, and that his stay would be only of a limited duration until it was safe for him to leave. Therefore, Laban trusted him and never suspected that he would flee from him.

Haamek Davar perceives Laban's heart as the subject of this phrase, the interpretation of the passage being: Jacob deceived [lit. stole the heart off] Laban the Aramean, in that Laban's heart did not reveal to Laban that Jacob would flee — and he therefore was not on guard against it.

21. וַיִּבְרַח הוּא וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ — Thus [lit. and] he fled with all he had.

Jacob assumed that God would keep the knowledge of his departure from Laban. As has often happened in Jewish history, however, God did not act as people wanted Him to. Instead, Laban learned of Jacob's flight, pursued and caught him — but God saved Jacob through another means. This eventual protection, too, is a common thread in Jewish history (*Haamek Davar*). [See footnote to v. 23.]

The Hebrew term for fleeing, בָּרַח, suggests flight from a place in anticipation of future danger and in cases where there is no pursuer; the term נָס indicates flight from a pursuer and a clear and present danger (*Sforno*).

וַיֵּצֵא וַיָּקָם וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת־הַנָּהָר וַיֵּשֶׁם אֶת־פָּנָיו
 לַאֲכַב־כַּג הָרַ הַגִּלְעָד: וַיֵּגֶד לִלְכֹן בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי כִּי
 כַּג בָּרַח יַעֲקֹב: וַיִּקַּח אֶת־אֲחִיו עִמּוֹ וַיִּרְדֹּף
 אַחֲרָיו דֶּרֶךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וַיִּדְבֹּק אֹתוֹ

And — וַיָּקָם וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת הַנָּהָר
 proceeded to cross the river [lit. and
 he arose and he crossed the river.]

I.e., the Euphrates (Onkelos;
 Targum Yonasan).

According to *Midrash Sechel
 Tov*, the word וַיָּקָם [lit. and he
 arose] connotes that after his departure
 from Aram, he arose spiritually
 [cf. וַיָּקָם in 23:17.]

— [And] he
 set his direction [lit. face] toward
 Mount Gilead.

His retinue was growing tired
 and he set his sight on the fertile
 pastures of Gilead to afford his people
 and livestock the opportunity of
 resting (*Haamek Davar*).

— He chose Mount Gilead
 because he prophetically foresaw
 that his descendants would win a
 great victory there in the time of
 יִפְתָּח, Jephthah [see Judges 11:29]
 (*Targum Yonasan*).

The territory soon to be named
 Gilead plays an important role in
 later Biblical history. It is a most
 fertile region, and lies east of the
 Jordan River. It was not named
 Gilead until later [v. 47]. The Torah
 uses the name by which it was
 already called in the days of Moses
 (*Abarbanel*).

Jacob wished to avoid the ar-
 duous and dangerous task of cross-
 ing the Jordan with his large camp.
 He intended to travel southward
 along the east bank of the Jordan to
 the southeast corner of *Eretz Yisrael*
 and enter by the land route to the

Negev region via Mount Seir, to
 Hebron where his father was. Cf.
 his reference to Seir in 33:14.
 Ultimately, however, he changed
 his route and took a shortcut by
 crossing the Jordan opposite
 Shechem (*HaRechasim leBikah*).

22. [Laban is informed of Jacob's
 departure. He pursues him and
 overtakes him in Gilead.]

— [And] it was
 told to Laban on the third day.

On the third day — because that
 was the distance between Jacob and
 Laban's flocks (*Rashi*); see on v. 19.

Ba'al HaTurim cites a *Midrash*
 that the informant was Amalek, a
 grandson of Esau, who also later in-
 formed Pharaoh that the Jews had
 fled [see *Exod.* 14:5. In both verses
 the expression וַיֵּגֶד... כִּי בָרַח occurs.]
 The numerical value of כִּי בָרַח
 [=240] equals עֲמֶלֶק, Amalek.

According to *Targum Yonasan*,
 Laban's shepherds told Laban after
 perceiving that the abundant bless-
 ing that had come to their region
 had ceased. They reasoned that
 Jacob must have left, and brought
 the news to Laban:

'After Jacob had gone, the
 shepherds went to the well but
 found no water; they waited three
 days in case it would again overflow
 but it did not. So they came to
 Laban on the third day and he knew
 that Jacob had fled because through
 his righteousness it had overflowed
 for twenty years' [see footnote to

31 4 had and proceeded to cross the river, and he set his direction toward Mount Gilead.

22-23 ²² It was told to Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled. ²³ So he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him a distance of seven days, catching up

28:10; and comm. to 29:2 s.v. *וַיִּקַּח אֶת אֶחָיו עִמּוֹ*.

23. *וַיִּקַּח אֶת אֶחָיו עִמּוֹ* — So [lit. and] he took his kinsman [lit. brothers] with him.

[The translation of 'brothers' as kinsman follows Rashi. Ramban in v. 46 observes that Laban's kinsmen were Jacob's kinsmen through marriage as well, and in that they were descended from Nachor, Abraham's brother.]

Laban's act of taking his kinsman with him in pursuit proves his aggressive intentions. As Midrash Tanchuma observes:

When Laban set out in pursuit of Jacob he intended to kill him, and the Torah accordingly speaks of Laban as if he had actually done so, as it says: *אֲרָמִי אָבִיר אָבִי* An Aramean, was the destroyer of my father [Deut. 26:5]. For the gentile nations, God equates evil intentions with actions [because their general performance justifies the assumption that they would indeed do so if they had the opportunity] (Rashi, Deut. ibid.).¹¹

Pharaoh also pursued the Jews. The events in Jacob's life were a

prognostication for his descendants (Rimzei HaTorah, Torah Sheleimah 31:50).

וַיִּרְדֵּף אַחֲרָיו דֶּרֶךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים — And [he] pursued him a distance of seven days.

During the three days that the messenger traveled toward Laban, Jacob had been proceeding on his journey. Consequently, by the time the messenger reached Laban, there was a six-day distance between them. On the seventh day [i.e., the next day, the day when Jacob covered the stretch of ground which made him seven travel-days apart from Laban's starting point (Sifsei Chachomim)], Laban overtook him. Thus, the distance Jacob would have traveled in seven days, Laban covered in one. [Hence, it says and he pursued him a distance of seven days; not that he actually pursued him for seven days. (This bracketed addition is not in all editions)] (Rashi).¹²

Rashbam points out that this was natural since Jacob would be traveling slowly on account of his flocks. He implies, however, that the interpretation is that Laban overtook Jacob after Jacob

1. Laban's cruelty is the reason why Jacob could not remain in Paddan Aram in fulfillment of God's prophecy to Abraham that his children would endure a long exile [15:13]. An allusion to this may be found in the verse *וַיִּרְדֵּף אַחֲרָיו דֶּרֶךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים* An Aramean was the destroyer of my father, and he went down to Egypt (Deut. 26:5); because of Laban the Aramean, Jacob was forced to undergo his exile in Egypt rather than in Aram (R' Munk).

2. Why did Jacob not enjoy *קִפְיוֹת הַדֶּרֶךְ*, contraction of the way, as he had on his way to Charan and as even Eliezer experienced when he was dispatched to seek a wife for Isaac? Had such a miracle recurred, Jacob would have been spared the ordeal of being overtaken by Laban.

By not giving him supernatural speed God demonstrated to Jacob that he need not fear any

וַיֵּצֵא כַד בֵּהָר הַגִּלְעָד: וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-לָבָן
 הָאֲרָמִי בַחֲלֹם הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הִשְׁמַר
 לְךָ פֶּן-יִדְבֹּר עִם-יַעֲקֹב מְטוֹב עַד-רָע:

had actually traveled seven days [i.e. Laban covered in four days the distance Jacob covered in seven].

Ramban suggests that Laban overtook Jacob after Laban had travelled seven days. First, he had to return to his city to get his kinsmen [thus, in effect, covering in seven days what Jacob traveled in ten days]. He cites *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* in support of his view. Ramban agrees, however, that according to the *Midrash* cited by *Rashi*, Laban began his pursuit without first returning to the city.

Tosafos HaRosh maintains that the episode occurred as follows:

Jacob first returned to the city where he and Laban lived. (It was there that Rachel stole Laban's *teraphim*). Jacob fled from there, and the messenger set out on the three day journey to inform Laban. Laban first returned home, a journey of three days, and also discovered that his *teraphim* were missing. By this time, Jacob was six travel days away. Laban set out in hot pursuit, overtook Jacob on the next day, covering in one day what had taken Jacob a week.

[Most estimate the distance Jacob traveled – from Charan to Gilead – at about thirty miles.]

וַיִּרְבֹּק אֹתוֹ בֵּהָר הַגִּלְעָד – *Catching up with him* [lit. and he became attached to him] on Mount Gilead.

– Where Jacob had stopped to pasture his flocks (*Haamek Davar*).

– Where Jacob had been offering praise and praying to God (*Targum Yonasan*).

harm from Laban even if there were to be a successful pursuit. To the contrary, if God had contracted the way for Jacob, it would have appeared as if *וַיִּרְבֹּק* it was not in His power to protect Jacob from a direct confrontation with Laban. Other benefits of this natural course were that Laban was forced to pledge that he would not harm Jacob, and that Rachel would be buried on the road where she would pray for Israel when it trudged into Babylonian Exile [see *comm.* 35:19] (*Or HaChaim*).

On the eve of the seventh day Laban reached the foot of the mountain and he saw Jacob encamped at a distance. That night as he slept below Jacob's camp, he dreamt the following dream (*Ramban*).

The translation of וַיִּרְבֹּק as *catching up with him* follows *Ramban* and others who hold that Laban did not actually overtake Jacob until after God's warning in the following dream. [Cf. *Ibn Ezra* next verse.]

The Hebrew refers to the point at which one can sight the other from afar (*HaRechasim leBik'ah*).

The entire plain was known as Mount Gilead. Therefore, as soon as Laban reached that plain where, although from afar, Jacob was encamped, he is said to have caught him; he did not actually overtake or confront him until the following morning [v. 25] (*Haamek Davar*).

24. God's warning to Laban.

וַיֵּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל לָבָן הָאֲרָמִי בַחֲלֹם הַלַּיְלָה – *But* [lit. and] God had come to Laban the Aramean in a dream by [lit. of the] night.

Through His angel Michael, brandishing a sword (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).

Before Laban even caught up with Jacob, God had already come to Laban. There are many such verses [which are not in strict chronological sequence, but which

with him on Mount Gilead. ²⁴ But God had come to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, 'Beware lest you speak with Jacob either good or bad.'

parenthetically revert to an earlier incident to supply us with more detailed information. They are omitted from the original narrative in order not to break the *initial continuity* of the story] (*Ibn Ezra*).

[This differs from *Ramban* cited above, that the verses here do reflect the correct sequence, and that Laban did not overtake Jacob until v. 25. Apparently, *Ibn Ezra* — like *Onkelos* — holds that וַיִּשָּׁן and וַיִּרְדֵּק are synonymous and both connote *overtake*; hence he explains the redundancy of verses 23 and 25 by explaining the interim verse as paranthetical. *Ramban* apparently maintains that וַיִּרְדֵּק connotes approaching closely; not until v. 25 did he overtake (וַיִּשָּׁן) Jacob.]

Laban is again referred to as הָאֲרָמִי [the Aramean, Midrashically interpreted as if it read הָרִמָּאִי, the cheat]: Though Laban was a cheat and his townspeople were idolators and diviners [see on v. 19 and 20], yet the prophetic dream came to him in honor of the righteous Jacob (*Ramban*).

— For just as God had come to Abimelech [20:3] in honor of Abraham, so did He come to Laban in honor of Jacob (*Radak*).

[Cf. *Radak* to 20:3 that to protect the honor of the righteous, God comes to gentiles in prophetic dreams. The *Midrash* similarly observes that God appears to heathens only at night. This was the case also with Balaam (see *Numbers* 22:20), since the deeds of the wicked are as dark as night.]¹¹

הַשָּׁמַר לִךְ כִּן תִּדְבֹר עִם-יַעֲקֹב — Beware lest you speak with Jacob.

— Even speech is forbidden you (*Sforno*).

According to the *Zohar*, speech was forbidden him because it had been Laban's intent not to wage physical war on him since Jacob was more powerful than he — but to kill Jacob through his words by casting a spell upon him. Thus God cautioned him not to communicate with Jacob at all (*Zohar*).

According to *Divrei David*, the intent in the literal sense was not that Laban avoid any communication, but that he avoid conversing on the matter of Jacob returning to Charan.

מִטּוֹב עַד רָע — Either good or bad [lit. from good until bad.]

[He should not even speak good] because [even] the goodness of the wicked is evil to the righteous. Since the righteous despise any benefits they may derive from wicked people, the benefit itself is not truly good (*Rashi* based on *Yevamos* 103b).

— Since the righteous man knows the enmity the wicked holds for him. What may appear to be an act of goodness is in reality, sinister in intent (*Kli Yakar*).

— In this case: What you might

1. Cf. also *Moreh Nevuchim* 2:51 that the phrase *God came to ... in a dream by night* does not indicate a prophecy, and the person mentioned in the phrase is not a prophet. The expression merely informs us that the attention of that person was called by God — through an angel — to a certain thing, and that this occurred at night.

... For just as God may cause a person to move in order to save or kill another person, so may He cause, according to His will, certain things to rise in man's mind in a dream by night.

וַיֵּצֵא לָבָן אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וַיַּעֲקֹב תָּקַע אֶת־
 אֹהֶלוֹ בְּהָר וּלְבָן תָּקַע אֶת־אָחִיו בְּהָר
 הַגִּלְעָד: וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לַיַּעֲקֹב מַה עָשִׂיתָ
 וַתִּגְנֹב אֶת־לִבִּי וַתִּנְהַג אֶת־בִּנְיָמִי
 כַּכְּשֵׁי חָרָב: לָמָּה נִחַצְתָּ לְבָרְחִי
 וַתִּגְנֹב אֹתִי וְלֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי וְאַשְׁלַחְךָ
 כַּכְּשֵׁי מַחֲמָה וּבָשָׂרִים בְּתֶף וּבִכְנוֹר: וְלֹא
 נִטְשָׁתָנִי לַנֶּשֶׁק לְבָנִי וּלְבִנְיָמִי עִתָּה

consider an act of goodness, such as enticing him to return with you to Charan, is really evil as far as he is concerned since the Divine Presence will not rest on him so long as he is associated with the wicked (*Sifsei Chachomim*).

Maskil l'David observes that the intent of the *Gemara Yevamos* 103b upon which *Rashi* based his exposition explains that God ordered Laban not to speak to Jacob even of good because he might seek to involve Jacob in a discussion about idols. Indeed, in verse 30, Laban did refer to the *teraphim* as gods.

According to *Ramban*, the literal sense is: *Either good* — i.e., neither entice him by promising to treat him well if he returns with you; *or bad* — nor threaten him with harm if he does not, for it is I Who commanded him to return to his land.

This explains how Laban conversed with Jacob at all after God's warning. But he avoided any mention of Jacob returning with him to Charan (*Divrei David*).

HaRechasim leBik'ah explains the expression *either good or bad* as idiomatically meaning *anything*, as in 24:50. [However, Laban ignored this implication of God's command and conversed with Jacob anyway, avoiding only the question of returning with him to Charan.]

The result of God's warning, as noted by *Midrash Aggadas Bereishis* [*Torah Sheleimah* #551] is that Laban did not

carry out his villainous plan of killing Jacob.

[And] — וַיֵּשֶׁב לָבָן אֶת יַעֲקֹב. *Laban overtook Jacob.*

In v. 23 Laban merely reached close to him; but now, in the morning, he actually overtook him and they met in a face-to-face confrontation (*Lekach Tov*). [Cf. *Ibn Ezra* and *Ramban* above.]

[And] — וַיַּעֲקֹב תָּקַע אֶת אֹהֶלוֹ בְּהָר. *Jacob had pitched his tent on the mountain.*

On the slope of the mountain itself (*Haamek Davar*).

[I.e. Mount Gilead, as further identified at the end of the verse (*Ramban* to 30:40).]

— וּלְבָן תָּקַע אֶת אָחִיו בְּהָר הַגִּלְעָד. *While Laban had stationed his kinsmen on Mount Gilead* [following *Onkelos*.]

— Jacob had taken tents with him for his family and servants, but Laban and his kinsmen had not. Laban stationed his entourage at the foot of the mountain. He was still at a distance from Jacob even though the entire plain is referred to as the hill country of Gilead (*Haamek Davar*).

Ibn Ezra interprets the word אֹהֶלוֹ, *his tent*, to refer to both Jacob

²⁵ Laban overtook Jacob. Jacob had pitched his tent on the mountain, while Laban had stationed his kinsmen on Mount Gilead. ²⁶ Laban said to Jacob, 'What have you done that you have deceived me and led my daughters away like captives of the sword? ²⁷ Why have you fled so stealthily, and cheated me? Nor did you tell me — for I would have sent you off with gladness, with songs, with timbrel, and with lyre! ²⁸ And you did not even allow me to kiss my sons and daughters. Now you have acted foolishly.

and Laban: Jacob pitched his tent and Laban pitched his with his kinsmen on Mount Gilead.

26. [Laban reproaches Jacob for having stolen away with his daughters as if they were captives taken in war]:

מה עשית ותגנב את לבני — What have you done that [lit. and] you have deceived me [lit. stolen my heart]?

What crime have you committed that compelled you to deceive me and flee? (*Abarbanel*).

— ותגנב את בנותי כשבייות חרב — And [you] led my daughters away like captives of the sword?

[I.e., like prisoners of war], 'sword' is a synonym for war (*Rashi*).

— Thus, preventing them from bidding farewell to their father and brothers (*Alshich*).

Laban feigns injured innocence in portraying himself as the aggrieved father by bringing up the matter of his daughters before the matter of Jacob's fleeing or the theft of his teraphim (*Haamek Davar*).

27. למה נחבאת לברחי ותגנב אתי — Why have you fled so stealthily [lit. why have you been stealthy to flee]

and cheated me? [lit. and stole from me]:

— And stole my heart [i.e. deceived me] as in v. 26 (*Rashi; Radak*).

— And stole my teraphim (*Haamek Davar*).

ואשלחך בשמחה ובשירים ברחי וכבנר — For I would have sent you off with gladness, [and] with songs, with timbrel and with lyre.

The question was rhetorical, the implication being: It was foolish of you to flee without telling me, for had you asked me I would have given you permission and made a gala farewell celebration for you (*Malbim*).

28. ולא נטשתי לנשק לבני ולבנותי — And You did not [even] allow me to kiss my sons and daughters.

— To kiss — i.e., a farewell kiss (*Ralbag*); or in the sense of נשק in 41:40: sustain, render: and you did not allow me to make provision for my sons and daughters (*Chizkuni*).

My sons here obviously means my grandchildren, for grandchildren are like children (*Radak*).

עתה הסבילת עשו — Now, you have acted foolishly.

[The phrase is idiomatic. The

ויוצא כט הסבֵּלֶתָ עָשׂוּ: יֵשׁ-לְאֵל יְדֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת
 לא/כט-לא עִמָּכֶם רָע וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיכֶם אָמַשׁ | אָמַר
 אֵלַי לֵאמֹר הַשָּׁמַר לָךְ מִדְּבַר עַם-יַעֲקֹב
 ל מְטוֹב עַד-רָע: וְעַתָּה הִלֵּךְ הַלֵּכֶת כִּי-
 נִכְסֶף וּנְכַסְפָתָה לְבֵית אָבִיךָ לָמָּה גִּנַּבְתָּ
 לא אֶת-אֱלֹהֵי: וַיַּעַן יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר לָלֶכֶן כִּי

Hebrew which treats *foolish* as a verb, and *acted* in the infinitive, would literally be translated: *Now, you have been foolish to do*, עָשׂוּ = עָשָׂה.]

— You have always been the sensible one; *now*, in this instance, you have acted foolishly (*Radak*).

How did you not expect that I would pursue you? (*Haamek Davar*).

29. יֵשׁ-לְאֵל יְדֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּכֶם רָע. — *It is within my power* [lit. *there is the power in my hand*] *to do you all* [עִמָּכֶם, second person plural] *harm*.^[1]

[The phrase is equivalent to *יש לידי*: *I have the strength and power in my hand to harm you*. The word *אל* [which in this case is a non-sacred noun] signifies *strength and abundance of power*, and it is in this sense that *אל*, *El*, is used as a Name of God [since He is the sum of all Power] (*Rashi*).

[That Laban made such a bold, confident statement implies that he was accompanied by a band of kinsmen large enough to have carried out the implied threat.]

However, the *Midrashim* cite Jacob's extraordinary strength [see on 29:10

and v. 45 below], and claim that Laban was merely boasting and glorifying himself; it was to Jacob's credit that Jacob allowed himself to be subjected to Laban's wickedness and that he responded humbly instead of seeking a physical test of strength.

There are other opinions that notwithstanding the phenomenal power of Jacob and his household, he feared a confrontation with Laban because he knew Laban's notorious capacity to do evil. Although Jacob had faith that God would be with him, he was hesitant, since one should not rely on a miracle, and he was apprehensive that perhaps he had committed some sin which would cause him to lose God's grace (see on 32:11). [Cf. *Sefer HaParshiyos*].

וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיכֶם — *But* [lit. *and*] *the God of your* [plural] *father*.

— To Whom I [too] give honor (*Rashbam*).

The intent is: It is only because of Him that I show you forbearance; you do not deserve it seeing how you departed without my permission, and deceived me in doing so (*Sforno*).

אָמַשׁ אָמַר אֵלַי לֵאמֹר — *Addressed me* [lit. *said to me*] *last night saying*.

As noted often in the commentary, the word *לֵאמֹר*, *saying* [lit. *to*

1. Me'am Loez, following Tz'ror HaMor suggests that when making this statement Laban turned to Jacob's sons and addressed them all. Hence the plural: I have it in my power to harm all of you [עִמָּכֶם]; also the use of *the God of your father*, your (plural) father. The implication is: "The God of your father [Jacob] addressed me last night and said, 'Beware not to speak to Jacob'; but to you, his sons, I can do as I please."

- 31** ²⁹ It is within my power to do you all harm. But the
29-31 God of your father addressed me last night saying,
 "Beware of speaking with Jacob either good or bad."
³⁰ Now — you have left because you longed greatly
 for your father's house. But why did you steal my
 gods?
³¹ Jacob answered and said to Laban, 'Because I

say] has several connotations: clearly, unambiguously; the communication is meant to be conveyed to others [i.e., לאמר, to retell].

In this case, *Midrash Lekach Tov* interprets that God addressed this communication to Laban, as Laban himself admits, לאמר לדורות, to convey to future generations [i.e. God's warning not to mistreat Jacob applies eternally to all gentiles who come in contact with Jacob's descendants] as it is written [Psalms 105:15]: Touch not My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm.

30. ועתה הלה הלבית בייבסותך נבספתה. — לביית אביך — [And] Now — you have left because you longed [lit. were longed for] greatly for your father's house.

[Both verbs are in the infinitive compound: lit. leave you have left ... longing you have longed to emphasize that Jacob's going was a fait accompli.]

The word נבספת meaning *desire* [long; yearn] occurs often in Scripture, for example: Psalms 84:3: My soul yearns (נבספתה...נפשי); Job 14:15: You desire (תבספת) your handiwork (Rashi; Ibn Ezra cites additional references).

The reason the verb is in the niph'al-passive form [lit. you were longed for greatly] is to suggest the familiar principle that feelings between people are reciprocated; since Jacob was longed for by his parents, he felt a parallel longing for them (*Karnei Or*).

למה גנבת את אלהי — [But] why did you steal my gods?

[The preposition *but* is not in the Hebrew, but implied. The sense of the passage is]: Granted that you were motivated to leave because of the great longing you had for your father's house, but how does that justify your stealing my gods?! (*Sforno*).

— The gods could be of no possible value in your father's house. Accordingly, your theft of the teraphim must have been a wanton, provocative act (*Haamek Davar*).

When the tribal ancestors [i.e. Jacob's sons] heard their grandfather [Laban] say this, they exclaimed, 'We are ashamed of you, grandfather, that in your old age you can refer to them as your gods!' (*Midrash*).¹¹

1. 'Laban had planned to uproot everything' (*Haggadah*). Laban, by his own admission (see also further, v. 29) was frustrated in his intention to murder Jacob and his family only by God's warning (*Vilna Gaon*, see *ArtScroll Haggadah* p. 101).

In his accusation, Laban was the prophetic forerunner of the old European potentates who so frequently hurled at Jacob's descendants the accusation 'Why did you steal my gods?' and used the allegation of stealing images or communion wafers as an opportunity to take the lives of the Jews and seize their property ... (Harav Miller: *Behold A People*).

וַיֹּצֵא לֹא/לִבִּי-לֵג לֵב מַעֲמִי: עִם אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא אֶת-אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא יִחְיֶה נֶגֶד אַחִינוּ הַכְּרִלְךָ מֶה עֲמַרְי וְקַח-לָךְ וְלֹא-יָדַע יַעֲקֹב כִּי רָחֵל גִּנְבָתָם: וַיָּבֹא

31. *Because I was afraid.*

Jacob answered the questions in order. This was his answer to Laban's first question [v. 26]: *What have you done that you led my daughters away?* (Rashi).

— כִּי אָמַרְתִּי פֶן-תִּגְזֹל אֶת-בְּנוֹתַי מֵעִמִּי — *For I thought [lit. said], perhaps you might [lit. lest you would] steal your daughters from me.*

Because you claim that you did not allow me to marry your daughters only to have me take them away from you, you prove that you would have thought yourself justified in detaining them, as well as my children and possessions. (This in fact appears to have been Laban's intention as is evident in v. 43). Furthermore, had I remained with you in Charan where you are influential, you could more easily get others to help you than you could if I am out of your country (Sforno).

Note that Jacob does not add insult to injury or provoke anger against his wives — Laban's daughters — by mentioning that they had encouraged him to flee [v. 14] (Haamek Davar).

1. This must be understood in light of the dictum in *Moed Katan* 18-9: *ברית ברוחה לשפתים*, a covenant has been made with the lips, i.e., the spoken word, even if uttered unintentionally, may unwittingly be fulfilled as if by prophecy.

And, just as one word uttered by a king can cause irreparable damage [see *comm.* to ArtScroll *Ecclesiastes* 10:5], the way in which something is expressed — even by a commoner — may contain a portent for the future. Accordingly, it behooves man to choose his words carefully.

The dictum in *Makkos* 11a may be cited in this connection: A curse of a wise man, even though uttered without cause, takes effect. [Although in this case the idols were not found in Rachel's possession and thus technically the condition of the imprecation was not met,

32. *עם אשר תמצא את אלהיך. — With whomever you find your gods. [Onkelos renders this differently; see below.]*

The following is Jacob's response to Laban's latter accusation that he stole the gods (Rashbam).

— לֹא יִחְיֶה — [He] shall not live.

This is construed by the Midrashim as a prayer, in the sense of an imprecation: *May he not live:*

— He will die prematurely (Targum Yonasan; *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).

The Sages in the Midrash perceive this curse which left the lips of the righteous Jacob, to have been — although unintentional — a prognostication of the future. In consequence of this curse, Rachel died on the journey (Rashi citing Midrash).⁽¹⁾

[In v. 14 above, an additional reason is offered: Rachel presumptuously answered before her older sister, and so died before her. Cf. also *Meshech Chochmah* to v. 13 that 'whoever leaves a vow unfulfilled, his wife dies.' Regarding Rachel's having died on the way rather than merit being buried in the Cave of Machpelah, see Rashi to 31:15 and 49:8.]

Rashbam, however, takes the literal sense of Jacob's remark to be: *He will not live — I will physically exact*

31 was afraid, for I thought, perhaps you might steal
32 your daughters from me. ³² With whomever you find
 your gods, he shall not live; in the presence of our
 kinsmen ascertain for yourself what is with me and
 take it back.' (Now Jacob did not know that Rachel
 had stolen them.)

vengeance upon him; *Ibn Ezra* interprets: *I will kill him*, while *Radak* is of the opinion that the implication is that the culprit will be placed in *Laban's* hands for retribution.

Jacob uttered this curse because he was convinced that the one who stole it had relapsed into idolatry (*Akeidas Yitzchak*; similarly, *Sforno* below).

Onkelos explains the imprecation to be not against the person with whom the gods are found, but against the place. He renders our passage: *The place where you find your deities will not endure* [i.e. that place will be destroyed. The word *יָחַד*, live, referring to inanimate objects is similar to *Nechemiah* 3:34: *Will they revive (הַיָּחַיִּים) the stones?* The concept of inanimate objects being subject to 'death' is reminiscent of the pronouncement in *Bava Kamma* 54a: Regarding inanimate objects — their breaking is their death (*Nesinah laGer*).]

וְגַדְתִּי אֲחֵינִי — *In the presence of our kinsmen* [following *Rashi*; lit. *brothers*.]

Although the reference is to the people who accompanied Laban, they are called *our kinsmen* because they were related to Jacob as well, both through marriage and because they were descended from Nachor,

the brother of Abraham (*Ramban* to v. 46).

הַכִּדְרֶיךָ מָה עִמָּדִי — *Ascertain for yourself* [lit. *recognize to yourself*] *what is with me*.

I.e., what of yours is in my possession (*Rashi*).

— If something other than the *teraphim* was stolen, take it back (*Ralbag*).

וְקַח לָךְ — *And take it back* [lit. *and take to yourself*].

— And we will indeed have been proven to be the culprits (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Jacob was not as firm regarding other property as he was regarding Laban's idols. Regarding the idols he said absolutely: 'Whoever took it is certainly an idolator and must die.' But he could not be so certain that one of the servants had not stolen something else; in that case, should Laban discover any of his property he should take it back (*Haamek Davar*).

וְלֹא יָדַע יַעֲקֹב כִּי רָחֵל גָּנְתָם — *Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them*.

The Torah thus parenthetically testifies that Jacob uttered the im-

nevertheless the curse took effect. See *Tosafos* s.v. אָפִילוּ.]

In this context, the *Midrash* notes that Rachel's death ensued because of Jacob's words ... and that Samuel's sons did not succeed their father because of what Eli said to him (see *I Samuel* 3:17; 4:11; 8:1 ff. Cf. also *comm.* to 22:5 s.v. וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה, and *Rashi* to 27:45 s.v. לָקַח אֶשְׁכָּל).

— This is what Jacob meant when he lamented [48:7]: מָתָה עָלֵי רָחֵל, *Rachel died through me* — i.e. through the imprecation of my curse (*Lekach Tov*).

Cf. also *Sefer Chassidim* #924 that though her motives in taking the *teraphim* were noble, since Jacob was present she should have inquired of Jacob, for whenever a wise man is available, his advice should be sought before any action is taken.

וַיֵּצֵא מִצָּאן מִצָּאן וַיֵּצֵא מִצָּאן
 לֵאָה וְבָאָהּ לֵאָה וְבָאָהּ לֵאָה
 שְׁתֵּי הָאִמָּהוֹת וְלֹא מִצָּאן וַיֵּצֵא מִצָּאן
 לֵאָה וַיָּבֵא בָאָהּ רָחֵל: וְרָחֵל לָקְחָהּ
 אֶת־הַתְּרָפִים וַתִּשְׁמֹם בְּכַר הַגִּמְלָה וַתִּשָּׁב
 עָלֵיהֶם וַיִּמְשָׁשׁ לָבֵן אֶת־כָּל־הָאֹהֶל וְלֹא
 מִצָּאן: וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־אָבִיהָ אֶל־יִצְחָק בְּעֵינַי

precation because he had suspected that the culprit was a servant who had relapsed into idolatry and had stolen the *teraphim* to worship in secret. If Jacob would have had even the slightest notion that *Rachel* had stolen them, he would: (a) never have had the audacity to deny it so boldly; and (b) never have uttered a curse since he never would never have suspected her of idolatrous motives. He would have been certain that her motive was lofty — to wean her father from idol worship (*Akeidas Yitzchak*; *Sforso*; *Alshich*).

33. [And] וַיָּבֵא לָבֵן בָּאֹהֶל־יִצְחָק. — [And] *Laban came into Jacob's tent*.

This was *Rachel's* tent, the tent where Jacob was generally found. [*Rachel's* tent was Jacob's usual home because she was his *primary* wife (see on 29:31 וַיֵּצֵא עֶקְרָהּ; and *Rashi* to v. 4 s.v. וַיִּקְרָא לָרָחֵל [וְלֵאָה]). Accordingly, in the genealogies of chapt. 46, only *Rachel* is referred to as *Jacob's wife*, a designation not given the other wives. When the verse concludes by saying that *Laban* went to *Rachel's* tent, it means that he returned for a second search of this tent (*Rashi*).

According to *Midrash Lekach Tov*, this was *Jacob's own* tent which he used for prayer.

Ramban similarly maintains that the tents of *Jacob* and *Rachel* can-

not be one and the same, since it would be incorrect for a tent to be variously called by two different names in the same verse, first *Jacob's* and then further *Rachel's* tent. He maintains, accordingly, that this refers to *Jacob's own* tent where he would dine with his children and members of the household.

וּבָאָהּ לֵאָה וּבָאָהּ שְׁתֵּי הָאִמָּהוֹת וְלֹא מִצָּאן — *And into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two maidservants [= Bilhah and Zilpah] but he found nothing [lit. and he did not find].*

Most commentators [*Rashi*; *Ibn Ezra*; *Ramban*; *Ralbag*] contend that, sequentially, *Laban* searched *Rachel's* tent *before* those of the maidservants. However, the Torah first mentions *all* the uneventful searches before going into the search of *Rachel's* tent because it was there that there was much to report. The search of *Rachel's* tent [according to *Rashi*, the second such search] is described last since the continuing narrative of the following verses focuses on her [see below].

Ibn Ezra cites an opinion that the singular form 'tent' of the two maidservants indicates that one tent served them both. *Ramban*, however, leans to the opinion that we must conclude that to preserve modesty — see *Niddah* 17a — each of *Jacob's* four wives had a separate tent.

31 ³³ *Laban came into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's*
33-35 *tent and into the tent of the two maidservants, but he*
found nothing. When he had left Leah's tent, he
came into Rachel's tent. ³⁴ Now Rachel had taken the
teraphim, put them into the camel's packsaddle and
sat on them. Laban rummaged through the whole
tent, and found nothing. ³⁵ She said to her father, 'Let

Akeidas Yitzchak suggests that the maidservants indeed had separate compartments within the same larger tent, a fact which is inferred from the singular designation 'tent'. Also, besides their respective separate entrances into their mistresses' tents, they had direct access to each other's tents so that they could assist one another in their duties.

וַיֵּצֵא מֵאֵלָה לֵאָה נִבְאָה בָּאֵלָה רָחֵל —
 When [lit. and] he had left Leah's
 tent, [and] he came into Rachel's
 tent.

He returned to Rachel's tent for a second search directly after leaving Leah's tent, because he recognized that she was a *משקשנית*, one who touches everything (*Rashi*).

[Thus, *Rashi* perceives the order of Laban's search to be: The tents of Jacob (=Rachel), Leah, Rachel a second time, and finally the maidservants. As noted above, the Torah reserves the mention of Rachel for the last because the narrative of the following verses focuses on her.]

Ramban, in following *Ibn Ezra* and most other commentators that Jacob had his own tent, maintains that the sequence was: the tent of Jacob; Leah; Rachel; the maidservants.

In the primary opinion cited by *Ibn Ezra*, but rejected by *Ramban*, the order of Laban's visits was as listed in the Torah: Jacob; Leah; the maidservants; Leah again, and Rachel.

R' Bachya takes the order literally: Jacob; Leah; the maidservants; Rachel. He conjectures why the Torah again mentions that Jacob left Leah's tent after that of the

maidservants, when it would appear more proper to mention that he left the tent of the maidservants and entered Rachel's tent. He suggests that the tent of Leah was the largest of them all, and together with the tent of the maidservants, it formed sort of a compound. Accordingly, when he left the maidservants he was still technically within Leah's tent.

34. וְרָחֵל לָקְחָה אֶת הַתְּרָפִים — Now
 [lit. and] Rachel had taken the
 teraphim.

In the interim; before Laban entered her tent, Rachel had taken the *teraphim* in order to hide them (*Chizkuni*).

וַתִּשְׁמַם בְּכַר הַגִּמְלָה — [And she] put
 them inside the camel's packsaddle.

The word *בַּר* literally means *pillow*; the rendering *packsaddle* follows *Onkelos* (*Rashi*).

וַתֵּשֶׁב עֲלֵיהֶם — And [she] sat on
 them.

In display of her utter contempt for Laban's 'gods', Rachel placed the idols beneath her (*Zohar*).

[And, as we see later, since 'the way of women' was upon her she knew Laban would not trouble her to rise.]

וַיִּמְשֹׁשׁ לְכֹן אֶת-בֵּית-הָאֵל וְלֹא מָצָא —
 [And] Laban rummaged [lit. felt]
 through the whole tent and found
 nothing [lit. and he did not find].

Laban perceived from the withdrawn way Rachel was sitting on the camel's packsaddles, that 'the way of women was upon her'. He

אֲדֹנִי כִּי לֹא אוֹכֵל לֶקֶם מִפְּנֵיךְ כִּי־דָרָךְ
נָשִׁים לִי וַיַּחֲפֹשׂ וְלֹא מָצָא אֶת־הַתֶּרֶפִּים:
וְיִחָר לִיעֲקֹב וַיִּרְבּוּ בְלָבוֹ וַיַּעַן יַעֲקֹב
וַיֹּאמֶר לְלָבֹן מַה־פָּשְׁעִי מִהַ חָטָאתִי כִּי
וְלָקַת אַחֲרַי: כִּי־מִשְׁשַׁת אֶת־כַּל־כְּלִי

therefore did not ask her to rise
(Akeidas Yitzchak).

35. אֲלִי־יָחַר בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי — *Let not my lord find it annoying* [lit. let it not annoy (or: anger) in the eyes of my lord].

[The translation annoy for יָחַר follows Rashi to Numb. 16:15; see comm. above to 4:5 וַיִּחָר לֵקֵן, this annoyed Cain. Onkelos renders it in the sense of let it not anger my lord. Cf. comm. to וַיִּחָר אָף in 30:2.]^[1]

— *That I cannot rise up before you.*

— To kiss your hand (Ramban).

Some see in the 'full' spelling לֹא an allusion that Rachel was not utterly telling an untruth; her intention was a double-entendre as if she were combining the two words לֹא, not, and לוֹ, for him. She was suggesting: לֹא, for him, לֹא אוֹכֵל לֶקֶם, for to him [to my father] I can not rise up — but to others, indeed I could (see Meshech Chochmah).

לִי — *For the way of women is upon me.*

According to most, this is a euphemism for menstruation, similar to the expression בְּנָשִׁים, the manner of women, in 18:11 (Michlol Yofi).

— What kind of excuse was it? Do menstruant women not stand up? — Perhaps she meant that her

condition had made her feel ill, as is not uncommon for some women (Ramban).

Ramban continues that this must be understood in the context of ancient times when menstruant women were kept in isolation. This fact is indicated by the very designation given them — *niddah* [lit. shunned] for even talking to them was avoided (see Ramban to Lev. 18:19; and cf. Resp. Chasam Sofer O. Ch. 23 regarding these measures in our times).

... Accordingly, Rachel intimated that though it would ordinarily have been proper for her to rise and kiss his hands, her status as a menstruant prevented her from doing so. And since one did not then converse with a *niddah*, Laban kept silent and did not answer her.

Tur cites an interpretation that by the way of women, Rachel meant that she was pregnant, for she was carrying Benjamin at the time. [This differs with the traditional rabbinic chronology according to which Benjamin was born two years later.]

— *Thus [lit. and] he searched but [lit. and he] did not find the teraphim.*

[Due to her condition, he did not search beneath her, but he continued to search elsewhere in the tent.]

1. [This is one of the few places in Scripture where the verb חָרָה occurs in conjunction with eyes; the usual idiom attaches it to אָף, nostrils.]

Haamek Davar accordingly comments that idiomatically, when the verb חָרָה occurs in conjunction with eyes, as here, and in Jonah 4:2, the connotation is *smarting* and *fierce displeasure*, rather than *anger*. The idiom here, *annoy in the eyes*, refers to the *smarting* one feels when one focuses his gaze on something for a prolonged period. Here, Rachel asked her father not to be displeased at the sight of her sitting passively while he was actively engaged in his search. Therefore, she implied: Please do not stare at me so; I cannot rise up before you, etc.

31 not my lord find it annoying that I cannot rise up
36-37 before you, for the way of women is upon me.' Thus he searched but did not find the teraphim.

³⁶ Then Jacob became angered and he took up his grievance with Laban. Jacob spoke up and said to Laban, 'What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me?' ³⁷ When you rum-

It was certainly a display of Divine Providence that Laban did not discover his *teraphim* in Rachel's possession. Besides the embarrassment she would have experienced, who knows what he would have done? (*Haamek Davar*).

36. [The Torah does not record whether or not Laban searched through the belongings of his grandchildren and every servant as well. Perhaps we are to assume that he did; or possibly Laban felt that none but Jacob or his wives — who were Laban's daughters — would have had the audacity to enter his tent and steal his 'gods.' Nevertheless when Laban had finished ransacking Jacob's belongings and failed to find what he was searching for, the outraged Patriarch — who had painfully maintained his silence all these years — could contain himself no further, and became indignant]:

וַיִּחַר לַיָּצֶקֶב וַיִּרְכַּב בָּלָקָן — Then [lit. and] Jacob became annoyed [or and this angered Jacob; see above v. 35 and comm. to 30:2], and he took up his grievance [lit. argued, up-braided] with Laban.

—Since Laban did not believe him, but searched through all his possessions. Although Jacob had invited Laban to make the search, he felt that Laban should have had the good manners not to do so (*Radak*).

Ramban observes, however, that

although Laban might have been justified in making the search after he had been invited to do so, Jacob had originally made the offer because he had thought that one of the members of his household might have stolen the *teraphim*. Now that they were not found, he suspected that the whole charge was a pretext by Laban to enable him to make a general search, and Jacob's indignation was accordingly aroused [similarly *Sforno*].

מָה פָּשַׁעִי מָה חַטָּאתִי — What is my transgression? What is my sin...?

[I.e., in what way have I wronged you? ...]

— [Transgression is a worse offense than *sin* in that the former is committed in a spirit of rebellion, while the latter denotes an inadvertent trespass (see comm. to Exodus 34:7 where the various terms for *sin* are defined).]

בִּי רָלַקְתָּ אַחֲרַי — That you have hotly pursued [after] me?

— As one pursues a thief? (*Ramban*).

[The verb *רָלַק* in its literal sense means to kindle.] Cf. the use of this verb in the figurative sense of pursuit in *Lam.* 4:19; and *1 Sam.* 17:53 (*Rashi*).

From parallel uses of the verb *רָלַק* throughout Scripture, *HaRechasim leBikah* maintains that the connotation is hot pursuit with intent to kill.

37. בִּי מִשְׁפַּח אֶת-כָּל-בְּלִי — When you rummaged through all my things [lit. utensils].

Jacob urged: 'When a son-in-law

וַיֵּצֵא מִהֶמְצֵאתָ מִכָּל כְּלִי-בֵיתְךָ שִׁים כֹּה נָגַד
 אֲחִי וְאַחִיקָּ וְיֹכִיחוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵינוּ: זֶה
 עֲשָׂרִים שָׁנָה אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ רֹחֵלִיךָ וְעֹזִיךָ
 לֹא שָׁכְלוּ וְאֵילִי צֹאנְךָ לֹא אָכַלְתִּי:
 לֹט טִרְפָּה לֹא-הִבֵּאתִי אֵלֶיךָ אֲנֹכִי אַחֲטָנָה

lives with his father-in-law, can he possibly avoid benefitting himself by at least a single item? Here, however, *when you rummaged through all my things what did you find of all your household objects?* — Nothing! Not even a needle or a hook! (Midrash).

Set it here. — שִׁים כֹּה

— [Either: any object of contention between us, or more generally]: publicly state any grievances you might have now (Radak).

Before my kinsmen [lit. brothers]. — נָגַד אֲחִי

— I.e. the shepherds and other men who accompanied Jacob [see v. 23] (Radak).

And let them decide between the two of us! — וְיֹכִיחוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵינוּ

— I.e., let them decide which of us is right; in Old French: *eprouver* [prove] (Rashi).

[Rashi thus distinguishes the meaning of the verb יָכַח in our verse (where it means *prove*; *decide*) from its other meaning of *reprove*; *chastise* (דוֹכָחַת) as below in v. 42.]

[Haamek Davar refers this, not to asking the kinsmen to decide who was right in their *general* relationship, but, to a request for a judgment on the particular points of conflict]:

'Perhaps we will disagree over the ownership of a certain article: they will be the arbiters and decide which of us is right' (Haamek Davar).

38. Jacob proceeds to justify himself indignantly, by recounting the hardship he endured while in

Laban's service. Laban's suspicion that Jacob would steal his gods — or *anything* of his, for that matter — was wholly unjustified as Jacob proceeds to emphasize (Haamek Davar):

These twenty years I have been with you. — זֶה עֲשָׂרִים שָׁנָה אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ

— And had I been dishonest, it would have been discovered sooner; no one can conceal dishonesty for so long. Furthermore, these twenty years were spent *עִמָּךְ*, with you, the ultimate rogue. No one is better able to sniff out chicanery than you. Had I ever attempted to cheat you, you would have known immediately (Or HaChaim).

Your ewes and she-goats never [lit. have not] miscarried. — רֹחֵלִיךָ וְעֹזִיךָ לֹא שָׁכְלוּ

— Because of deficient pasture or negligence (Rashbam).

The care I gave them was exemplary; I always allowed them to travel at their own pace, without rushing them (Chizkuni).

According to Midrash Lekach Tov: They never miscarried, since your flocks were blessed because of me. [Cf. Laban's remark (30:27): *HASHEM has blessed me on your account.*]

Nor did I eat rams of your flock. — וְאֵילִי צֹאנְךָ לֹא אָכַלְתִּי

— As other shepherds allow themselves to do (Sforzo).

[The term אֵיל, ram, (lit. the

31 maged through all my things, what did you find of all
38-39 your household objects? Set it here before my
 kinsmen and your kinsmen, and let them decide
 between the two of us.

³⁸ 'These twenty years I have been with you, your
 ewes and she-goats never miscarried, nor did I eat
 rams of your flock. ³⁹ That which was mangled I
 never brought you — I myself would bear the loss,

strong) refers to male sheep. When the word is used to describe animals eligible for sacrificial use, it refers to a sheep older than thirteen months and one day old. A yearling is referred to as *שנה* or *שנה* (see *Rashi* to *Numbers* (15:11; *Tosafos Bava Kamma* 65b s.v. *איל*, and *Toras Kohanim* cited by *Mizrachi*). In the *Talmud* a yearling is called *טלה* (lamb; see *Bava Kamma* *ibid.* 'if one stole a *טלה*, lamb, and it grew into an *איל*, ram...'). From Jacob's statement that he did not eat from the rams of the flock, it is deduced (see *Rashi* below) that *איל*, ram, when used in a general, non-sacrificial sense (as *Tosafos* *ibid.* explains), refers to the male of the sheep irrespective of age.]

As *Rashi* explains: From this remark [which Jacob intended to be to his credit] the Sages [*Bava Kamma* 65b] deduced that a male sheep even when one day old is called an *איל*, ram. Otherwise, it would be incongruous for Jacob to substantiate his honesty by saying that he did not steal animals older than thirteen months — while omitting from his disclaimer younger animals. Are we otherwise to infer that he proudly protested that he did not eat [grown] rams, but did eat smaller ones? Certainly not! If so he would have been a thief! [Rather, as the Sages point out *איל*, ram, in this

context signifies even very young ones. 'Even these,' said Jacob, 'I did not eat.']

Convention permitted shepherds who were a long distance from home, and where other foods could not be bought, to eat rams which were too young to give birth and were therefore more expendable than the more mature animals. 'But I never availed myself of this right,' said Jacob (*Chizkuni*).

Lekach Tov offers that Jacob said this to differentiate himself from other shepherds who habitually ate rams and claimed that wolves had devoured them. [Furthermore, as Jacob says in the next verse, he voluntarily paid for such genuine losses even though shepherds are not responsible for them.] Why did shepherds use this alibi specifically with the rams? — Because, as noted in *Shabbos* 53b, rams travel at the head of the flock and are thus more prone to attack; they are also fatter and more tempting than ewes. Also, the haughty walk of rams rouses the ire of wolves. [Thus a claim that a ram had been attacked by a wolf would be a plausible one.]

39. טָרַפָּה לֹא הֵבֵאתִי אֵלֶיךָ — That which was mangled [lit. torn] I never brought [to] you.

Mangled — by a lion or a wolf (*Rashi*).

For a shepherd is not required to combat such vicious animals even if he observes them in the act (*Haamek Davar*).

וּצֵא מִיָּדֶי תִּבְקַשְׁנָה גִּנְבֹתִי יוֹם וּגְנֹבֹתִי לַיְלָה:
 לֹא/מִמָּא מ הֵייתִי בַיּוֹם אֲכַלְנִי חֶרֶב וְקָרַח בְּלֵילָה
 מַא וַתִּדְר שְׁנָתִי מֵעֵינִי: זֶה-לִּי עֲשָׂרִים שָׁנָה

If an animal is mangled by wild beasts while in a shepherd's care, it is termed *אונס*, *beyond his control*. Jacob would have been exempt from payment in such a case if he could corroborate his claim through witnesses or by a display of limbs of the mangled animal [see Exodus 22:12]. However, because Jacob accepted this added responsibility while guarding the flocks, he never even bothered bringing Laban mangled animals. Likewise, Laban held him accountable (*Nachalas Yitzchak*). [Cf. *Sforno* below.]

R' Bachya infers from this statement that Laban's flocks were never attacked by wild beasts, so exemplary was Jacob's care.

אֲנִי אֶחָשָׁן — I myself would bear.

I.e., the financial loss from such accidents would have been mine, since *מִיָּדֶי תִּבְקַשְׁנָה*, *you exacted it from me* [lit. *from my hand* (i.e., you demanded restitution)] (*Rashi*).

— And I paid you though not legally required to (*Ramban* v. 36).

Cf. this use of the verb in *Judges* 20:16: *וְלֹא יָחָט*, *shall not miss*; and *1 Kings* 1:21: *I and my son Solomon are חָסְרִים* (= *חסרים*), *lacking* [in authority]. *Onkelos*, too paraphrases: 'that which was missing (שָׁמָּה) from the count' [i.e., when something was miscalculated inadvertently, and I thought there were less sheep than there really were, you always insisted on exacting payment according to the lower, erroneous, count (*Karnei Or*); see *Nesinah LaGer*]. *Onkelos* evidently takes the verb in the sense of *something missing*, synonymous with the verb *נִסְקָר*, *missing*, in *Numbers* 31:49 (*Rashi*).

Ibn Ezra relates the word to *חָסָה*, *sin*,

and renders the phrase as if it were spelled *אֲנִי אֶחָשָׁן*: if there was a mangled animal *I was considered to have sinned* through negligence — and you exacted compensation from me.

Cf. *Targum Yonasan*: Something mangled by wild beasts I did not bring to you; for had I sinned, from my hand you would have sought it.

Sforno also interprets the verb as connoting *sinful negligence*, but explains the syntax differently: I did not bring to you any animal which was mangled *אֲנִי אֶחָשָׁן*, because of any *sinful negligence on my part* [such losses I made good as a matter of course]. I brought you only those whose mangling I could not prevent and for which I could not be held liable, but even for those you [injustly] demanded restitution.

וְהֵייתִי יוֹם וּגְנֹבֹתִי לַיְלָה — *Whether it was stolen by day or stolen by night.*

— I repaid everything (*Rashi*).

What was stolen in the day by men — that I made good, and what was stolen in the night by wild beasts I also made good (*Targum Yonasan*).

[The rule is that a paid watchman is legally responsible for theft. If so, why did Jacob mention obligations that would have fallen upon any comparable worker?]

— *Tur* interprets this phrase as referring back to *mangled* animals, for which a paid watchman is not liable on the grounds that it is beyond his power to fight off wild, carnivorous animals. Thus, the flow of the verse is: 'I would bear the expense of mangled livestock whether they were stolen [by wild animals]

31 from me you would exact it, whether it was stolen by day or stolen by night. ⁴⁰ This is how I was: By day scorching heat consumed me, and frost by night; my sleep drifted from my eyes. ⁴¹ This is my twenty

during the day or night.'

— Among the many instances listed by Jacob, he was legally responsible for some, such as theft, and not responsible for others. His intent in expressing this pent-up reproach was to illustrate the dimensions of the plight into which he had entered in order to win his two wives. [See *comm.* of R' Shmuel ben Chafni Gaon; *Bava Metzia* 93b; *Choshen Mishpat* §303.]

— Rashi explains that the suffix י in the word גנבתי is superfluous [=גנבת] similar to the י in *Lam.* 1:1 רבתי [=רבח] and מלאתי *Isaiah* 1:21 אהבתי *Hoshea* 10:11 אהבתי. *Ibn Ezra* interprets similarly as do *Rashbam* and *Radak* who add that if the י were the first person pronominal suffix [=my גנבות], the word would have been vowelized with a *kametz*: גנבתי.

Heidenheim submits, however, that grammatically it is possible for the י to be a first person pronoun, the passage meaning: you exacted from me that which was stolen from me by day and that which was stolen from me by night.

The *Midrash* translates: 'I was called a thief [גנב] by day and by night.' [People who saw the phenomenal increase of your flocks constantly taunted me and accused me of stealing animals for your benefit from other people.]

Onkelos enigmatically interprets the pas-

sage: נזירית ביוםא ונזירית בלילה, I watched by day and I watched by night [see *Nesinah* l'Ger who cites *Machberes Menachem* where it is suggested that this is a euphemism for 'that which was hidden from me by day ... and night.']

40. — קייתי. [This is how] I was.

ביום אכלני חרב — By day scorching heat consumed me.

— The metaphor of heat consuming [lit. eating] is similar to [Deut. 4:24]: אש אכלה, consuming fire (*Rashi*).

וחרב בלילה — And frost by night.^[1]

The word קרח lit. ice in the figurative sense of frost occurs in *Psalms* 147:17: משליך קרחו כפתים; He casts forth His ice like morsels [where it refers to the effects of cold weather, as in our verse] (*Rashi*).

[And] my sleep drifted from my eyes.

— Because of my super-vigilance (*Ralbag*);

— In constant alert lest you deceive me (*Lekach Tov*).

[The word נדד derives from the verb נדר, lit. wandering, and figuratively refers to insomnia. Comp. *Esther* 6:1: נדדה שנת המלך; sleep eluded the king (lit. the king's sleep wandered).

According to one view in the *Midrash*, during those sleepless nights

1. The *Talmud* [*Bava Metzia* 83b] discusses Jacob's statement in the context of the obligations incumbent upon a paid watchman. Was Jacob required to see to the flock's protection day and night, or was he going beyond the *halachic* requirement? According to one view, this kind of vigilance is required only of the night watchman of a city [since the responsibility for all the citizens' security is his (*Rashi* ad.loc.)]. Accordingly, Jacob was referring to the super-vigilance with which he guarded Laban's flocks, as though he were a city watchman.

The prevailing view in the *Talmud*, however, is that any paid watchman must exercise such care. This requirement is derived from Jacob's own description of his duties. See *Choshen Mishpat* §303.

בביתך עבדתיך ארבע-עשרה שנה ויצא
בשתי בנותיך ושש שנים בצאנך ותחלף לא/מב
את-משכרתי עשרת מנים: לולי אלהי
מב אבי אלהי אברהם ופחד יצחק יהיה לי

Jacob said the fifteen *Shir HaMaalos* [Songs of Ascents] (Psalms 120-134); the constantly recurring word *Israel* in those psalms refers to the Patriarch Israel. [Maharzu observes that contemplation of those psalms would yield many subtle parallels relating to Jacob's experience.]

41. — זה לי עשרים שנה בביתך. — *This is my twenty years in your household* [lit. *this is to me twenty years in your home.*]

[I.e., Jacob's twenty years in Laban's home comprised the two time periods given later in the verse.]

These twenty years that I spent in your house are לי, to me — the responsibility for them is upon me; I will yet be punished for these years by suffering for an equal period. [I.e., Jacob was away from his parents for these twenty years plus the two years that elapsed during his trip home. His punishment was that Joseph was separated from him for twenty-two years] (*Rashi* to 37:34; see *Chronological Deductions* appended to 28:9).

Above [v. 38] when Jacob initially described his twenty years of work, he did not use the word לי, to me. There, in speaking to Laban he said עמך, with you. The effects of those years can be seen from two viewpoints: Jacob's and Laban's. In verse 38, Jacob describes Laban's point of view [עמך]: for Laban, Jacob's twenty years were blessed, productive, and profitable. But from Jacob's standpoint [our verse], they were years of unrelieved travail, swindle, and danger (*Heidenheim*).

עבדתיך ארבע עשרה שנה בשתי בנותיך — *I served you fourteen years for your two daughters.*

One detects here a note of bitterness as Jacob alludes to Laban's trickery which caused him to work fourteen instead of seven years for his wife. Jacob is not more explicit, however, in consideration of Leah's feelings (*Hoffmann*).

— ושש שנים בצאנך — *And six years for your flocks.*

[Thus, whatever flocks you see here are rightfully mine; I worked six hard years for them.]

— ותחלף את משכרתי עשרת מנים — *And you changed my wage a hundred times.*

You constantly altered our agreement by changing the terms from spotted to speckled, and from ringed to checkered (*Rashi*).

[For the translation of a hundred times, and the explanation of this charge, see *comm.* to parallel passage above v. 7.]

— The contextual implication of the passage is: Although I served you faithfully, and as your son-in-law should have been treated with consideration, the opposite was the case: *For you changed my wage a hundred times* (*R' Bachya*).

There is no doubt that Laban was indeed guilty of this. Otherwise Jacob would never have accused him of it to his face. Moreover, were the charge not true, Laban would have vigorously denied it (*Abarbanel*).

31 years in your household: I served you fourteen years
 42 for your two daughters, and six years for your
 flocks; and you changed my wage a hundred times.
 42 Had not the God of my father — the God of
 Abraham and the Dread of Isaac — been with me,

42. לֹדִי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי ... הִיָּה לִי — Had not the God of my father ... been with [lit. to] me.

[The expression God ... being with me denotes God's Providential protection, as in His promise: אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ, I am with you; see comm. to 28:15. Specifically, here it refers to God's Providence assuring — notwithstanding Laban's constant changes of terms — that the flocks bore whatever mutations which would belong to Jacob (see verses 8 and 9 above). For were it not for this Divine intervention, Laban's trickery would have indeed resulted in Jacob's being sent away empty-handed.]

By citing various verses in which the term לֹדִי [lit. if not] occurs, the Midrash concludes that the term introduces a prayed-for source of protection or merit. In our verse, it refers to the merit of the Patriarchs; elsewhere it refers to the merit of the Divine Name or of faith [Psalms 22:13]; and the merit of the Torah [ibid. 119:92.]

וַיִּפְחַד יִצְחָק — And the Dread of Isaac.

I.e., the Awe of Isaac; He Whom Isaac feared. This use of פִּחַד, Dread, as an appellation for God, occurs again in v. 53 (R' Bachya). [This, also, is the implication of Onkelos who renders וַיִּפְחַד יִצְחָק He Whom Isaac dreads.]

Jacob avoided saying God of Isaac because [as noted in the

comm. to 28:13] God does not associate His name with a living righteous person. Although God referred to Himself in 28:13 as God of Isaac, it was, as noted, because Isaac was blind and could be regarded as dead. Jacob, however, was afraid to use this designation, and substituted the Dread (Rashi).

Ibn Ezra interprets: The merit of Isaac's fear of God [יִצְחָק ה'] has helped me, for the merit of the father helps the son [in This World; it is only in the World to Come that the Sages in Sanhedrin 104a proclaimed that a son's merit helps a father (because it is assumed that the father's teaching or example was instrumental in the son's deed), but not vice versa (Rif ad. loc.; see Maharsha and Ein Yaakov).]

Below in v. 53, however, Ibn Ezra interprets the expression like Onkelos cited above: He Whom Isaac dreads.

Radak suggests that by using the expression Dread of Isaac, Jacob was referring to the purest form of Awe of God that inspired Isaac to submit himself to the Akeidah [Chapt. 22] (similarly Ibn Ezra [v. 53]; Pesikta Zutresah).¹¹

— It was also the merit of the physical fear experienced by Isaac at the Akeidah that was his support (Lekach Tov).

R' Hirsch interprets the express-

1. Alternately, Radak suggests that by this appellation Jacob was referring to his own fear that he might not see Isaac alive unless he returned home immediately. Jacob thereby insinuated that it was for two reasons that he was not thrown out of Laban's household empty-handed: (a) because the God of Abraham had been with him during his service; (b) because of his premature departure out of fear that he might not find his father alive; otherwise Jacob

כִּי עָתָה רִיקָם שְׁלַחְתָּנִי אֶת-עֲנִי וְאֶת-
יָגִיעַ כְּפִי רָאָה אֱלֹהִים וַיּוֹכַח אִמְשׁ: וַיֵּעַן
לָבָן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-יַעֲקֹב הַבְּנוֹת בְּנֹתַי
וְהַבָּנִים בְּנֵי וְהָצֵאן צֵאנִי וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-אֵתָה

וַיֵּצֵא
לֵאמֹר

מג
שביעי

ion similarly: the sacred Awe felt by Isaac at the *Akeidah*. In this interpretation, the *dread* of our verse refers to Isaac's *feeling* when he felt the knife at his throat. He conquered his instinctive fear, and dedicated himself to God's will. Thus Jacob found merit in the God of Abraham and the merit of Isaac.

כי עתה ריקם שלחתני — *You would surely have now sent me away empty handed.*

— [Your constant changing of my wages and other deceptions you perpetrated against me would otherwise surely have resulted in my now being sent away empty-handed.]

את עניי ואת יגיעי כפי ראה אלהים — *God saw my wretchedness [lit. affliction] and the toil of my hands.*

I.e., He perceived that whatever I achieved was by great toil and He pitied me, and vindicated me accordingly.

From this passage the *Midrash* derives that labor is more precious than ancestral merit, for 'ancestral merit saved wealth whereas labor saved life' [i.e., that Jacob was not

sent away empty-handed he attributed to the God of his father ('*had not the God of my father,*' etc.); but God's warning that Laban dare not harm Jacob, he attributed to the *toil of his hands*, which God had 'seen' and rewarded.]

Accordingly, *Tanchuma* notes that one must not have the attitude that he need do nothing and that Heaven will provide for his needs. Rather man must first toil with his hands, and then God will send His blessing. Cf. *Psalms* 128:2 *When you eat the labor of your hands [then] you shall be happy and it shall go well with you.*

[The term 'seeing' when applied to God connotes intellectual perception. See footnote to 1:10. Cf. also 16:11 and 29:32.]

The key factor in God's defense of Jacob was *his wretchedness*. Had not Jacob endured so much suffering, God would have exercised His Attribute of ארך אפים, *patient withholding of anger*; Laban would have succeeded and Jacob would have earned even greater reward for the World to Come. But due to Jacob's *wretchedness*, God paid him his wages on the day they were due [*Deut.* 24:15], so to speak, and reprimanded Laban (*Or HaChaim*).

— ויוכח אמש — *So [Targum Yonasan;*

might have remained longer and Laban would surely have found some way to swindle him out of his entire fortune.

Accordingly it was this obsession with his father's well-being that, as noted above in v. 30 [You have left because you longed greatly for your father's house], caused him to depart immediately without prior notice.

Chizkuni [followed by *Kli Yakar*] submits that Jacob was attributing his relative well-being to Laban's fear of Isaac who had a reputation as a powerful potentate, as well as the protection of the God of Abraham.

you would surely have now sent me away empty-handed. God saw my wretchedness and the toil of my hands, so He admonished you last night.'

⁴³ Then Laban spoke up and said to Jacob, 'The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children and the flock is my flock, and all that you

lit. and] *He admonished* [you (not in the Hebrew, but implied)] *last night*.

[This refers to God's warning to Laban (v. 24) not to harm Jacob, to which Laban himself made reference in verse 29.]

The translation of נִיבַח as *admonished* follows *Rashi* who insists that in this context the word implies תּוֹכַחָה, *rebuke, reproof*, and not הוֹכַחָה, *clarification, proof* as the verb means above in v. 37. [This is because in our context *Rashi* holds that there was no question that had to be clarified.]

Ramban, however, interprets: *and He rendered it*, i.e., *judgment, last night*. He maintains that there was indecision clarified by God's appearance to Laban, for Jacob had said [v. 38] that those present should *decide* between them. Now he observed that God, Who knows the hidden secrets, *did* [by revealing himself to Laban] *decide* between them. If the word meant *admonish*, *Ramban* concludes, the passage should more properly have read שֶׁשָׁמַע אֶת־ךָ אֶת־ךָ, *He reprimanded you last night*.

R' Hirsch interprets the phrase as does *Ramban* and renders: *And He proved it last night*.

According to *Kli Yakar*: *And last night He proved it*. Do not say that whatever you are doing is out of the goodness of your heart. Your state-

ment regarding last night proves that you have no kind feelings towards me. By your own admission; only God's warning of last night prevents you from harming me [v. 29].

43. הַבָּנוֹת בָּנֹתַי וְהַבָּנִים בָּנֵי — *The daughters are my daughters, [and] the children [lit. sons] are my children [lit. sons]*.

— The girls whom you married are my daughters, and the children whom they bore will be considered as mine, and the sheep are my sheep (*Targum Yonasan*).

Some perceive in Laban's words a claim based on the primitive custom of their region whereby the head of the family was the nominal owner of all that belonged to its members. Unable to answer Jacob's reproaches, Laban invokes this weak quasi-legal claim which — by implication — also entitled him to examine all of Jacob's possessions. He then pretends to be solicitous for the welfare of his daughters and grandchildren, and suggests a pact [see *Hoffmann* and *Eisenstein*].

וְהַצֹּאֵן צֹאֲנִי — *And the flock is my flock*.

All the animals came into your possession by fraud, so even if I had changed your wage a hundred times or would have sent you away empty-handed, I would have been well within my rights (*Sforno*).

וַיֵּצֵא לֵאמֹר מִדְּמָה מִן הַיּוֹם אֲנִי לְבָנֶיהֶן אֲשֶׁר יֵלְדוּ: וְעַתָּה לָכֵּה נִכְרְתָה בְרִית אֲנִי וְאַתָּה וְהָיָה לְעַד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ: וַיִּקַּח יַעֲקֹב אֶבֶן וַיְרִימָה מִצְבָּה:

Is mine. — לי הוא

This is an instance where לי, lit. to me; means שלי, mine (Rashi to 32:18 s.v. לָמִי אַתָּה).

Yet to my daughters — what could I do to them [lit. to these] this day?

— [I.e., they are, nevertheless, my daughters; my own flesh and blood] —How could I possibly conceive of harming them. [By separating them from their husband, or their children from their father? (Rashi; Mizrahi; Tzeidah laDerech).

According to Ramban, it was a question: What can I do for them? Laban was defending himself against Jacob's charges, and claimed that he had pursued him merely to see his daughters and determine if there was anything he could do to benefit them, since his mercies were greatly stirred by them. He went on to suggest a covenant for this purpose.

The expression לָאֵלֶּה, to these, is somewhat superfluous, following as it does the word לְבָנֶיךָ, to my daughters. The translation follows Ibn Ezra and Radak who view the word לָאֵלֶּה, to these as constituting additional clarification, similar to I Samuel 20:42 נִשְׁכַּעְנוּ שְׁנֵינוּ אִנְחֵנוּ, lit. we have sworn, the two of us, we.

Ramban as noted above explains the

significance of the passage by interpreting: ... And for my daughters, what can I do for these who are in my presence — since I am deeply stirred by them and their children?

According to Sforno, the flow is: All that you see is mine; וְלִבִּי, and it should go to my daughters as their dowry. But if I took it from you as I rightfully could, לָאֵלֶּה, what could I do for them to provide for their future well-being? Therefore, since I do not wish to harm you, Come, let us make a covenant to assure that you do not harm me either.^[1]

Or to their children whom they have borne?

— For they were born while in my house and they are like my own children (Ramban).

[HaKsav V'HaKaballah interprets Laban's oblique reference to his grandchildren as having a contemptuous connotation; see footnote.]

44. Laban proposes a treaty.

— Come, let us make a covenant, I and you.

[Literally, the phrase reads let us 'cut' a covenant. As explained above in Rashi and the footnote on 15:9, p. 519, this was the idiomatic expression for entering into a covenant. The usage was based on the ancient custom of cutting an animal to seal the agreement. Although no such 'cutting' was involved in our

1. HaKsav V'HaKaballah differs and wonders why we should seek to impute to the wicked Laban such commendable instincts as compassion for his daughters? This is the same Laban whom tradition describes as more of a rogue than Pharaoh in that he wished to totally uproot everything! [Cf. ArtScroll Haggadah p. 100ff.]

He suggests that everything about Laban's remarks bespoke bitterness: Only God's warning to him prevented him from annihilating even his own flesh and blood who dared follow their husband and leave him. He added לָאֵלֶּה, to these, in the contemptuous manner of one who speaks of an enemy and cannot even bring himself to look at him directly; similarly he made an oblique reference to the children she bore as if they were total strangers.

31 see is mine. Yet to my daughters — what could I do to
44-45 them this day? Or to their children whom they have
 borne! ⁴⁴ So now, come, let us make a covenant, I and
 you, and He shall be a witness between me and you.'

⁴⁵ Then Jacob took a stone and raised it up as a

verse, the idiom is retained.]

This is the good I can do for my daughters by assuring that you will not afflict them and will take no other wives in addition to them (Ramban).

— Since I intend you no harm, I want to make this covenant to assure that you will likewise not harm me (Sforno).

Hoffmann notes that two distinct agreements were concluded by Laban and Jacob: (1) that Jacob would in no way ill-treat Laban's daughters (vs. 48-50); (2) that neither Laban nor Jacob would pass the mound of stones raised up as a landmark, with hostile purpose toward the other (vs. 51-53).

Haamek Davar cites Sh'mos Rabbah 3:3 that use of the word לָקַח (rather than לָקַח) with the suffix ה, implies that the task at hand could be performed only by the person being addressed. Thus, Laban was implying to Jacob, 'You are the only one whom I would trust to make a pledge concerning the well-being of my precious children, and to make a commitment never to engage in hostile acts against me.'

וְהָיָה לָעֵד בֵּינִי וּבֵינָךְ — And He shall be a witness between me and you.

The translation which treats God as the subject follows Rashi.

Ramban offers two interpreta-

tions: (a) that the subject is the בְּרִית, covenant — The 'covenant' shall be a witness; whoever violates it shall be accursed; (b) or possibly the intent is that Laban was suggesting that they set up a קֵזֶם, a tangible monument, which would be a permanent symbol attesting to the covenant. For that purpose, Jacob took the stone that was described as the witness (v. 52). Compare the stone which Joshua set up as a witness in Joshua 24:27. [See Tosafos cited on footnote to v. 52.]

[Note that also in v. 48 below it is the mound (not God) that is called the witness. However, in v. 50 it is God Who is invoked as witness.]

R' Hirsch maintains [with Rashi] that this passage can refer only to God to Whom Jacob had referred and Who had already intervened. It could not mean that the 'covenant' should be the witness since the word בְּרִית is feminine; thus the verb should have been וְהָיְתָה, not וְהָיָה. Perhaps this is why Ramban above offers his second interpretation that the subject is not the בְּרִית, covenant, but the implied קֵזֶם, something tangible.

45. וַיִּקַּח יַעֲקֹב אֶבֶן וַיְרִימֶהָ מִצְבָּה — Then [lit. and] Jacob took a stone and raised it up [as a] monument

... Note further in this context how Laban wryly said: 'what could I do to them this day?' — Today, I cannot harm them because God warned me only yesterday. But, as Sefer HaYashar notes, Laban nursed his hatred. It was he who later summoned Esau to intercept them on their way to Canaan [see footnote to 32:2].

For the moment, however, the frustrated and sinister Laban feigned compassion and, in the manner of a true rogue, piously spoke of a peace treaty.

[Perhaps Rashi, Ramban and others who view Laban as compassionate would similarly agree that he was basically insincere. Following God's warning, this demeanor was the only way he could depart and save face.]

31 monument. ⁴⁶ And Jacob said to his brethren, 'Gather stones!' So they took stones and made a mound, and they ate there on the mound. ⁴⁷ Laban called it Yegar-sahadusa, but Jacob called it Gal-ed.

46-48

⁴⁸ And Laban declared, 'This mound is a witness

Nachor, brother of Abraham. [See *comm.* to v. 23]. According to the latter view, these men were related to Jacob as well as to Laban. But out of respect to his father-in-law, Jacob addressed his instructions to gather stones to *them* rather than to Laban. [See also v. 54.] A similar usage [of a pronoun not referring to the first subject in a verse] occurs in 47:3 And Pharaoh said to 'his' brothers, i.e. to Joseph's brothers.

לקטו אבנים — Gather stones.

— And make a mound upon which we will eat to commemorate our friendship, and which will also serve as a witness when we make the covenant (Ramban; see below).

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ גֵל — And [they] made a mound.

[— A heap of stones set up as a landmark, pillar, etc.]

וַיֹּאכְלוּ שָׁם עַל הַגֵּל — And they ate there on [or: by (cf. 24:13)] the mound.

A meal was part of the ceremony of the covenant signalling the mutual acceptance of the pact (Radak to 26:30; Rashbam to 25:31).

Ramban explains that they partook of a small meal to commemorate the event, or perhaps it was customary for parties who entered a covenant to share a loaf of bread to signal their camaraderie. After they finalized the covenant they would offer sacrifices and make a great feast. Possibly, the

meal included the offering mentioned below in verse 54.

וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ לָגֵן יֶגֶר שְׁהָדוּתָא — Laban called it Yegar-sahadusa.

— [I.e., he referred to the mound-memorial in Aramaic as Yegar-sahadusa which means 'the mound is a witness' and which, as Rashi notes, is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew name Gal-ed. The actual naming (קָרָא שְׁמוֹ) came later (next verse).]

The *Midrash* notes that the value of the Aramaic (סורסין, Syrian=Aramaic. Cf. *Aruch*; *Tosaf. Bava Kamma* 83a; *Rashi Sotah* 49b) language must not be underestimated because God paid it the honor of including it in the Torah [here], the Prophets [Jeremiah 10:11], and in the Writings [much of Daniel and Ezra is written in Aramaic].

[See *Ibn Ezra* to 30:37 and *Karnei Or* that Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic are closely related.]

וַיַּעֲקֵב קָרָא לוֹ גֵּלְעָד — But Jacob called it Gal-ed [the Hebrew for 'the mound is a witness'].

— Jacob retained the Hebrew language and did not abandon it (*Sforno*).

[See *comm.* to 14:13 that *Ivri* refers to Jacob's branch of Abraham's family, who remained loyal to the language of Eber, Hebrew; while Eber's other descendants, through Nachor, spoke Aramaic. The latter are therefore referred to as Arameans.]

The use of the converseive ו, and subject-verb arrangement of our verse (וַיַּעֲקֵב קָרָא) instead of the more common וַיִּקְרָא serves to emphasize the contrast with the previous statement — Laban called ... but Jacob called. See *comm.* to 14:18 s.v. וּמַלְכִּי־צֶדֶק, but Malchizedek.

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לְאָחִיו לְקָטוּ אֲבָנִים וַיִּקְחוּ מו וַיֹּצֵא
 אֲבָנִים וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-גֹל וַיֹּאכְלוּ שָׁם עַל-הַגֵּל: לֹא/מִרְמַח
 וַיִּקְרָא-לָו לָכֵן יִגֵּר שְׁהִדּוּתָא וַיַּעֲקֹב קָרָא מו
 לָו גִּלְעָד: וַיֹּאמֶר לָכֵן הַגֵּל הַזֶּה עַד בֵּינֵי מח

[more literally: a standing stone (see on 28:18)].

I.e., he put it on a high part of the mountain where it could be seen from afar. Therefore the word *raised* is used, not *set up*; [as in 28:18] (*Radak*).

The word *מצבה*, *monument* or *pillar* is related to the root *יצב*, to *stand*. He raised it up [as a *standing stone*] to symbolize that the matter would stand permanently (*Sforno*).

Ibn Ezra renders: He raised it by standing it up [שהציב אותה].

As soon as Laban spoke of a covenant and invoked God as a witness, Jacob raised a stone as a monument. Laban needed no such tangible evidence of the covenant — to him, Jacob's word was sufficient. But Jacob, knowing with whom he dealt, put more faith in the physical evidence than in Laban's word (*R' Hirsch*).

According to *Midrash Tanchuma*, it was Jacob *alone* who, in a display of extraordinary strength, took the boulder and raised it up as a pillar. This proved to Laban that it was really *not* in Laban's power to do him harm as he had boasted in verse 29. [See *comm.* there regarding Jacob's having voluntarily assumed a

role of humility in his dealings with Laban.]

46. לְאָחִיו — To his brethren.

— The reference is to *Jacob's sons* who were 'brethren' to him, standing by him in trouble and battle (*Rashi*).

Rashi pursues this interpretation rather than the possible interpretation that Jacob ordered *Laban's* kinsmen to gather stones (see below). *Rashi* holds it would have been improper for Jacob to issue orders to strangers; or for him to refer to these people as 'brethren' while they were still ready to harm him at Laban's command. After the covenant was concluded, however (v. 54), he could call them his 'brethren' (*Gur Aryeh*).^[1]

Cf. the *Midrash*: Jacob had only one brother, who would have been better off buried! Rather the term *brethren* refers to Jacob's sons who, in the Holy Tongue are here called brothers. *R' Huna* said, [They are called his *brethren*] in the sense that they were as valiant and righteous as he. *R' Yudan* said, 'when a man puts on his father's garment, [follows in his footsteps] he becomes his equal.'

According to *Ramban*, the reference is to *Laban's kinsmen* who, as noted in verse 23 above, had accompanied him. They were either his *companions* whom the Torah refers to as *brethren*, or they were his *kinsmen*, descendants of

1. *Haamek Davar* agrees with *Rashi's* interpretation that it refers to Jacob's sons, since as *Gur Aryeh* notes, had it referred, as it does in v. 23 to Laban's kinsmen, it would have been improper for Jacob to order strangers to gather stones.

What message then is to be derived from the fact that the Torah calls them *brothers* instead of *sons*? Furthermore, why did Jacob have his sons rather than his servants do this menial task? — Jacob acted true to form in refusing to be outraged by Laban's impudence. Instead, he sought to create a friendly atmosphere by inviting his adversaries to a meal. This was a trait he wanted to inculcate into his children. Therefore, he wanted them to make the necessary preparations and — rather than allow them to act only out of obedience to a 'father's' command — he addressed them as comrades as if to say 'do this because it is good,' not because it is commanded.

וַיֵּצֵא לַאֲמֹתָיו
וּבֵינָהּ הַיּוֹם עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ גִּלְעָד:
וְהַמִּצְפָּה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יֵצֵף יְהוָה בֵּינִי
וּבֵינָהּ כִּי נִסְתֵּר אִישׁ מֵרֵעֵהוּ: אִם־תַּעֲנֶה
אֶת־בְּנֹתַי וְאִם־תִּקַּח נָשִׁים עַל־בְּנֹתַי אֵין

48⁵⁰. [The first part of the treaty: That Jacob will in no way ill-treat Laban's daughters]

48. הַגִּל הַזֶּה עַד בֵּינִי וּבֵינָהּ הַיּוֹם — *This mound is a witness between me and you today.*

— Of what I am about to say (*Sforno*).

Laban apparently uttered these words in Hebrew, hence the significance of the mutually agreed-upon name (*Ramban*; see below).

עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ גִּלְעָד — *Therefore he named it Gal-ed.*

A combination of the two words גִּל, *the mound is a witness* (*Rashi*).

Laban subordinated himself to Jacob by agreeing to the Hebrew name. It is possible, however, that Laban may have also said this in Aramaic, but the Torah gives the Hebrew version (*Ramban*).

This name later evolved into גִּלְעָד, *Gilead*, as the mountain is referred to today (*Hoffmann*).

49. וְהַמִּצְפָּה — *And [as for] the Mitzpah [=watchtower].*

According to *Rashi* as explained by *Ramban*, the watchtower was a high, conspicuous structure on the mountain; it was *not* the mound or pillar. Thus, our passage is elliptic:

it additionally explains that the structure was called *Mitzpah*, *Watchtower*, because... (See *Judges* 11:29.)

[Thus, according to *Rashi* the sense is: *And as for the Mitzpah, it was so called because he said* (i.e., one said to the other), *'May HASHEM keep watch.'*]

Ramban's own opinion is that *Mitzpah* was another name given to Jacob's monument, and our passage is to be connected to the previous verse: *Therefore he named it Gal-ed and [also] Mitzpah* — i.e., he gave the monument both names (following *Tur*).

R' Eisenstadt explains *Ramban* as follows: The mound which the 'brethren' gathered was called *Gal-ed*, while the monument that Jacob set up was called *Mitzpah* ... *Comp. Yalkut Mayan Ganim* (*Torah Sheleimah* #118): 'The mound was for Laban, and the pillar for Jacob.' Cf. also *Radal* in *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 36:112 citing *Vilna Gaon*.¹¹

There is an opinion that the ancient Hebrews erected pillars or monuments which consisted of one boulder while the Arameans made mounds consisting of many stones. Therefore Jacob himself erected the *pillar* but instructed Laban's kinsmen to make a *mound*. Consequently, although Laban made several references to the pillar as well as to the mound, the essential aspect of the

1. Jacob made a covenant with the people of the land because Laban said to him, 'I know that God will give your descendants all these lands in the future. Make a covenant with me that they will not take possession of the land of Aram ... nor will they enter the land of Aram with evil intent, nor shall the Arameans enter Eretz Yisrael with evil intent.'

When David reigned he wished to enter Aram but was prevented from doing so on account of Jacob's oath until he broke the monument. [Although David's justification for doing so is

31 between me and you today'; therefore he named it
49-50 Gal-ed. ⁴⁹ And as for the Mitzpah — because he said,
 'May HASHEM keep watch between me and you
 when we are out of each other's sight. ⁵⁰ If you will
 ill-treat my daughters or if you will marry wives in
 addition to my daughters — though no man may be

pact as far as he was concerned, consisted of not passing over the mound [v. 52] (see *Karnei Or* par. 36).

— *Because he said, 'May HASHEM keep watch [Hebrew Yitzef, associated with Mitzpah] between me and [between] you.'*

According to *Ibn Ezra*, this reverts to Laban: Jacob named it Mitzpah because Laban said, 'May HASHEM keep watch, etc.'

— *When we are out of each other's sight [lit. when we are hidden, man from his comrade.]*

— And will not see [i.e. not be able to watch] one another (*Rashi*).

Indeed, they never again saw one another after they parted on the morrow (*Pesikta*).

50. — *If you will ill-treat [lit. afflict] my daughters.*

— By denying them their conjugal rights (*Rashi*, *Yoma* 77b).

[That affliction refers to this form of abstinence is evidenced by the *halachah* that abstinence from marital union is one of the afflictions mandated on Yom Kippur. (See *Torah Temimah* and *comm.* to *Lev.* 16:29).]

— By marrying other women while my daughters are alive (*Midrash*; this view is disputed by

the *Talmud* above which maintains that only the second clause refers to rival wives).

Ibn Ezra and *Radak* take it in the literal sense: By ill-treating them, subjecting them to indignity, deprivations, or compelling them to do things they dislike.

[On אַם see below.]

— *Or if you will marry [lit. take] wives in addition [lit. upon; cf. 28:9] to my daughters.*

— Even after my daughters die (*Midrash*).

The verse mentions *my daughters* twice [when grammatically, since *daughters* is the obvious subject, in our phrase the pronoun *them* would have sufficed]. This emphasizes that the oath was to refer to a second set of daughters, Bilhah and Zilpah, for, as noted in the commentary to 29:24,29, they were his daughters from a concubine (*Rashi* [*Midrash*]).

— *Though no man [may] be among us.*

— Since we will live in separate countries there will be no man who will be able to ensure that you keep the covenant and bring you to account should you break it (*Radak*).

not recorded in Scripture, the treaty was already null and void because it had been abrogated by the Arameans. Similarly, in a recorded incident, it was the Philistines who first violated the oath. See *I Chron.* 18:3 and *Radal* here (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*).

[Compare the effects of Abraham's oath with Abimelech in footnote on page 771, and of Isaac's oath in footnote on page 1108.]

וַיֹּצֵא לַאֲנָנִיג נא
אִישׁ עִמָּנוּ רָאָה אֱלֹהִים עַד בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ:
וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לִיעֲקֹב הִנֵּה | הַגֵּל הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה נב
הַמִּצְבָּה אֲשֶׁר יָרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ: עַד הַגֵּל
הַזֶּה וְעַדָּה הַמִּצְבָּה אִם-אֲנִי לֹא-אֶעֱבֹר
אֵלֶיךָ אֶת-הַגֵּל הַזֶּה וְאִם-אֲתָה לֹא-
תַעֲבֹר אֵלַי אֶת-הַגֵּל הַזֶּה וְאֶת-הַמִּצְבָּה
גג הַזֹּאת לְרָעָה: אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹרָהֶם וְאֱלֹהֵי

Or: *Since there is no one among us who is fit to act as witness to our pact* [— either morally, or since kinsmen are invalid witnesses] (Chizkuni) ...

[Or possibly since guardians cannot be appointed over matters of marital intimacy and no one could therefore possibly be appointed to assure that you do not deprive my daughters of their conjugal rights] ...

Sforno formulates a rule in his *comm.* to 14:23 s.v. קְחוּטָם [comp. also *comm.* to 21:23 s.v. אִם תִּשְׁקַר and 26:29 s.v. אִם תַּעֲשֶׂה], that the word אִם, if, where it is not explicitly followed by a condition has the implication of an oath. Accordingly, the meaning of Laban's statement would be not if, but *that*, i.e., you are forbidden to do so. In our verse then, the implication would be that you are hereby adjured by a sacred oath that *you will not ill-treat my daughters and that you will not marry wives in addition to my daughters.*

[According to Ramban's interpretation in 21:33, the word אִם, if, when used in connection with oaths, signifies an implied consequential imprecation. Tailored to our verse, this would mean: *If you will ill-treat my daughters — then God Who is a witness between me and you will punish you appropriately.* For, as Ramban notes in 21:33: 'In all such cases the Torah shortens the expression, leaving the threatened consequences to the imagination rather than explicitly

stating them.' (Cf. *comm.* to 26:29 s.v. (אִם תַּעֲשֶׂה).]

— [But (not in the Hebrew, but exegetically implied)] *see, God is a witness between me and [between] you.*

— Therefore, God shall serve as witness to the terms of our pact (Radak).

— And He will exact retribution from you, for, [since He is a witness,] being false to me is equivalent to being false to Him (Sforno).

51-53. [The second part of the treaty: That neither Laban or Jacob will pass the mound of stones thrown up as a landmark, with hostile intention toward the other]

הַגֵּל הַזֶּה הָיָה הַמִּצְבָּה אֲשֶׁר ... יָרִיתִי — *Here is this mound, and here is the monument which I have cast* [following Rashi (see below); Rashbam renders: *set up*] *between me and [between] you.*

Although Jacob set up the monument and mound, Laban speaks of *himself* as having done so since Jacob acted on Laban's advice by suggesting the covenant. Furthermore, as noted above [see Ramban's interpretation of 'brethren' in v. 46 above], Laban's kinsmen gathered the stones to make the mound; therefore Laban takes credit for the

31 among us — but see! God is a witness between me
51-52 and you.' ⁵¹ And Laban said to Jacob, 'Here is this mound, and here is the monument which I have cast between me and you. ⁵² This mound shall be witness and the monument shall be witness that I may not cross over to you past this mound, nor may you cross over to me past this mound, with hostile purpose.

action of his subordinates (*Radak*).

Rashi interprets ירה in the sense of cast, 'like one who casts an arrow' [i.e., heaped up effortlessly Laban thus boasts of his prowess as if setting up the monument and mound were an effortless act which he himself had done. However, see *Midrash Rabbah* ad loc] (*Yafeh Toar*).

52. עַד הַגֵּל הַזֶּה וְעֵדָה הַמָּצָה — This mound shall be witness and the monument shall be witness.

In the literal sense: These landmarks will serve as reminders. Should any of us wish to violate our covenant, when we see them we will be reminded of our pact (*Ibn Caspi*).⁽¹⁾

אִם-אֶנִּי לֹא אֶעֱבֹר אֵלַיִךְ אֶת הַגֵּל הַזֶּה לְרָעָה ... — That I may not cross over to you past this mound ... with hostile purpose [lit. for evil].

For evil — i.e., for doing evil. But for purposes of trade, you may cross over (*Rashi*; *Midrash*).

The translation follows *Rashi* and *Ibn Ezra* who render אִם [usually if] as meaning in this case אֲשֶׁר, that, as in 24:33: עַד אֲשֶׁר-עַד אִם, until that.

Tur cites an interpretation of אִם in the sense of if, and לְרָעָה as meaning: in the event of trouble. The implication is that they made a mutual defense treaty and this passage implies a euphemistic imprecation: 'This mound shall be a witness [and may some unmentioned disaster befall me] if I will

1. Such oaths have spiritual as well as legal force. The Sages attached particular significance to oaths taken upon objects, for these 'witnesses' can avenge the violation of the oath for which they take responsibility, so to speak. In this regard, *Daas Zekeinim* cites a touching story from *Rashi* and *Tosafos*, *Taanis* 8a, s.v. בחורורה:

A girl on the way to her father's house fell into a well. A young man passing by her asked, 'If I get you out, will you marry me?' She agreed, and they swore to one another that neither would marry anyone else. 'But,' they said, 'who will be the witness to our oath?' There was a weasel passing by, so they agreed that the well and the weasel would be their witnesses.

The girl kept her promise, but the young man married someone else. His wife gave birth to a boy — but a weasel bit him and he died. She had another child — but he fell into a well and died. The distraught mother exclaimed, 'What is it that causes us to suffer so much more than others!'

Her husband remembered his long-forgotten oath and told her about it. She said, 'If so, divorce me and marry her.'

In this context, *Hadar Zekeinim* records that Jacob and Laban thrust a sword into the heap to be an additional 'witness'. Balaam son of Beor [the latter is Midrashically identified as Laban while according to *Sefer HaYashar*, Beor is identified as Laban's son] who, years later, crossed the mound to curse Israel, was indeed struck by these very 'witnesses'. The wall against which Balaam's foot was crushed [see *Numbers* 22:25] was this same heap, and with this sword that they now thrust into the heap, he was ultimately killed, for it is written [*ibid.* 31:8]: 'They slew Balaam son of Beor with the sword' — implying a sword well-known from days of yore ... Support for this concept is found in the verse [*Deut.* 17:7]: 'The hands of the "witnesses" shall be first to put him to death [cf. *Bereishis Zuta*; *Tur*; *Torah Sheleimah* #117].

נחור ישפטו בינינו אלהי אביהם וישבע
 יעקב בפחד אביו יצחק: ויזבח יעקב
 זבח בהר ויקרא לאחיו לאכל-לחם
 ויאכלו לחם וילינו בהר: וישבם לכן
 בבקר וינשק לבניו ולבנותיו ויברך
 אתהם וילך וישב לכן למקמו: ויעקב

ויצא
 לאנדר

לב-א-ב

מפטיר א

not cross this mound [to help you] in the event of trouble, or if you fail to cross it [to help me] in the case of trouble.' [Cf. interpretation of **א** in v. 50.]

53. אלהי אברהם ואלהי נחור. — *The God of Abraham and the god of Nachor judge between us — the god of their father [=Terach].*

The passage should be understood as if it read: *The God of Abraham and the god of Nachor, the god of their father, judge between us* (R' Bachya).

Laban thus proposed to invoke both the *God of Abraham* [Jacob's grandfather] as well as the *god of Nachor* [Laban's grandfather] with the explanation that he included the latter because he was also the *god of their* [=Abraham and Nachor's] mutual father, Terach (*Sforno*).

Although the phrase *god of their father* [Terach] is separated by the phrase *may judge between us*, it reverts to and modifies *god of Nachor*. It thus refers to Terach's idolatrous gods [rather than to Abraham's God]. This is evident from *Joshua 24:2* where Terach and Nachor are described as serving other gods (*Ibn Ezra; Karnei Or*).

Laban mentioned Abraham and Nachor because they were more renowned than Isaac and Bethuel (*Radak*).

According to *Ibn Ezra*, the phrase *the god of their father* is a parenthetic interpolation which explains

that each invoked his *own God*: Jacob, the God of his grandfather Abraham; and Laban, the god of his grandfather Nachor [see *Yohel Or*].

The capitalization of the word *God* in its first appearance, referring it to *HASHEM*, and the subsequent use of the lower-case *god*, referring it to an idol, follows *Rashi* citing the *Midrash*: *Rashi* comments that the word אלהי in *God of Abraham* is sacred [i.e. refers to *HASHEM* and may not be erased (*Mizrachi*)]; the designation *god of Nachor* is non-holy [i.e. אלהי in his case is a designation for an idol and may be erased]; *god of their father* is similarly non-sacred [since this designation includes Terach's idols (see *Soferim 4*)].

— וישבע יעקב בפחד אביו יצחק. *And Jacob swore by the Dread of his father Isaac.*

I.e., the God whom his father feared (*Targum Yonasan*).

[On the term *Dread of Isaac* see *comm.* to parallel designation in v. 42.]

Since Laban proposed to invoke idolatrous deities in his oath, Jacob refused to swear with the formula devised by Laban. Instead, he took the oath by the True God — the God of *Isaac* who was not Terach's son [and therefore his God would not be coupled with the idols invoked by Laban] (*Sforno*).

54. ויזבח יעקב זבח בהר. — *Then [lit. and] Jacob slaughtered an animal on the mountain.*

The term זבח [slaughter] usually

- 31 ⁵³ May the God of Abraham and the god of Nachor
53-54 judge between us — the god of their father.' And
Jacob swore by the Dread of his father Isaac. ⁵⁴ Then
Jacob slaughtered an animal on the mountain and
summoned his kinsmen to break bread. And they
broke bread and spent the night on the mountain.
- 32 ¹ And Laban awoke early in the morning; he kissed
1-2 his sons and his daughters and blessed them. Then
Laban went and returned to his place. ² Jacob went on

has a ritualistic sacrificial connotation, in which case the passage would be rendered: *Then Jacob offered a sacrifice*. The translation follows *Rashi* who explains it in the sense of: *slaughtered cattle for a feast* (*Radak* interprets similarly: *He prepared a farewell feast*).

Rashi pursues this line of interpretation since Jacob would certainly not have shared a sacrificial feast with the idolatrous Laban and his companions (*Gur Aryeh*).

וַיִּקְרָא לְאֶחָיו — And summoned his kinsmen [lit. brothers].

— *Laban's kinsmen*, i.e., the companions who had accompanied Laban [see v. 23] (*Targum Yonasan*; *Rashi*).

After the covenant they are all properly referred to as 'brothers' (*Radak*).

Jacob addressed the invitation to the entire group, rather than to Laban individually, out of respect to them, so as not to intimate to Laban that all of them were subject to his authority (*Ramban* to v. 46).

Rashi here does not suggest, as he does in v. 46, that 'kinsmen' refers to Jacob's sons since our verse says that Jacob summoned them. This would not apply to Jacob's sons whom we must presume were at Jacob's side throughout these events, whereas Laban's companions were not and had to be summoned to partake of the meal (*Divrei David*).

וַיִּשְׁבּוּ לֶחֶם — To break [lit. eat]

bread.

[I.e., to partake of a meal]. Bread connotes food in general, as for example in *Daniel* 5:1: לֶחֶם רַב, a great feast; *Jeremiah* 11:19: עֵץ בְּלֶחֶמוֹ, a tree with its produce (*Rashi*; comp. *Rashi* to *Lev.* 21:21; cf. *Radak*, *Shorashim* s.v. לֶחֶם).

His intention was that they should part on good terms after having entered into a treaty, and that they should spend the night there (*Ramban*, v. 46).

וַיִּשְׁבּוּ לֶחֶם — And they broke [lit. ate] bread.

[I.e., ate a meal, bread being considered the primary staple.]

XXXII

1. וַיִּשְׁבּוּ לֶחֶם בֹּקֶר — [And] Laban awoke early in the morning.

לְבָנָיו — His sons.

That is, his grandsons (*Ibn Ezra*) — Jacob's son's (*Targum Yonasan*).

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָהֶם — And [he] blessed them.

Although the Sages have taught that even the blessing of a common person — like Laban — should not be denigrated, Scripture has a deeper purpose in mentioning Laban's blessing. It is meant to teach how effective a blessing can be when it is conferred with total sincerity, for Laban was surely sincere in blessing

וַיֵּצֵא לָבָן
הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ וַיִּפְגְּעוּ בוֹ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים:
וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב בְּאִשְׁרֵי רָאָם מַחְנֵה אֱלֹהִים
וְהָ וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא מַחְנֵי:

his own daughters. Such selfless commitment is efficacious because it is an expression of the Godly nature of man's soul (*Sforno*).

וַיֵּלֶךְ לָבָן וַיָּשֹׁב לְכֵן לְמִקְמוֹ — Then [lit. and] Laban went and returned to his place.

— I.e., to his former state of poverty, as he was before Jacob came to him [cf. 30:27 where Laban himself attributes his prosperity to Jacob's presence]. Robbers entered his house and impoverished him (*Midrash*).

According to others, the implication is that he returned to his wickedness (*Bereishis Zuta*).^[1]

2. וַיַּעֲקֹב הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ — [And] Jacob went on his way.

— On his way of righteousness unaffected by his exposure for the past twenty years to the rogue, Laban (*Tzror HaMor*).

[As noted in the *comm.* to 28:10, the commentators attribute Jacob's unaffected spiritual survival in alien Charan to his fourteen years of preparatory Torah study in the Academy of Eber.]

וַיִּפְגְּעוּ בוֹ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים — And angels of God encountered him.^[2]

— To assist him on his journey (*Ibn Ezra*).

— They were angels who minister in Eretz Yisrael. They came to meet him to accompany him into the Holy Land (*Midrash; Rashi*).

[The angels who accompanied Jacob outside Eretz Yisrael escorted him back

1. What did the devious Laban do after this ostensibly 'peaceful' departure from Jacob and his children?

— When he returned home he dispatched his son and a representative delegation of his family to Esau. He ordered them to incite Esau by relating a tale of how Jacob came penniless to Laban's house seeking refuge after outwitting Esau; how Laban befriended him and gave him his two daughters in marriage; and how Jacob prospered immensely and fled secretly while Laban went to shear his sheep — and even stole Laban's *teraphim*!

'I left him with everything he owns,' the message to Esau concluded, 'at the mountain of the brook of Jabbok. If you wish, you can intercept him there and do to him as you please.'

Laban's messengers related the message to Esau who became incensed. His old hatred toward Jacob was ignited again as he heard their words, and he set out with a mightily armed camp.

Laban's messengers then went to Canaan and told Rebecca that Esau was advancing on Jacob with an armed camp of four hundred men to slay him and take all his possessions.

Rebecca then dispatched seventy-two men who met Jacob, and Jacob said when he met them: *this camp is destined me from God* [see 32:2]. They related to him about his parents' welfare and then gave him Rebecca's message regarding Esau with the advice that Jacob take steps to placate Esau: '... when he approaches you, supplicate him. Do not speak rashly to him, and give him a present from what God has blessed you with ... Conceal nothing of your personal affairs from him, perhaps he will be appeased and you will be spared. It is your duty to consider his dignity for he is your elder brother.'

When Jacob heard his mother's message, he wept bitterly and proceeded to follow her instructions [see *Sidra Vayishlach*] (*Sefer HaYashar*). [*HaKsav V'Hakabbalah* makes reference to the incident of Laban's inciting Esau when he negated Laban's sincerity in his *comm.* cited at the end of 31:43.]

[The above does not follow the general Rabbinic opinion cited by *Midrash Tanchuma* that Jacob himself was taken to task for 'taking the dog by the ears' by sending emissaries and attracting Esau's attention who presumably would otherwise not have been attracted to him.]

his way, and angels of God encountered him.³ Jacob said when he saw them, 'This is a Godly camp!' So he named that place Machanaim.

as far as the border. There he was greeted by a fresh band of angels who were to escort him in *Eretz Yisrael*. The reverse occurred when he departed from the Holy Land, since as noted in the *comm.* to 28:12, angels who minister in the Holy Land cannot go beyond the frontier. Apparently then, *Rashi* is of the opinion that when Jacob left Mount Gilead for the region he named Machanayim, he was in the environs of *Eretz Yisrael* and presumably the mound heaped up by Jacob marked this boundary line. *R' Bachya* to 31:52 also maintains that Gilead was the border between *Aram* and *Eretz Yisrael*. In support, he cites *Deut.* 34:1: *And HASHEM showed him all the land of Gilead until Dan*. As noted *ibid.* 3:12, this was later in the Transjordan.]

Ramban differs in certain respects with several of the geographic conclusions stated above [see *Mizrachi* and *comm.* to 32:23 and 35:18]. He offers, therefore, that Jacob was still a long way from the Holy Land, and after crossing the Ford of the *Jab-bok* [below 32:33] he still had to pass the boundary of *Ammon* and *Moab* before reaching *Shechem* [33:18]. Accordingly, this vision of the angels came to him when he entered enemy territory to assure him that the angels would be with him against his enemies [and that he need not fear *Esau*, since now, with

the troops of angels, Jacob outnumbered him (*Abarbanel*).]

[According to the selection from *Sefer HaYashar* cited in the footnote to v. 1, these מלאכים were human messengers sent to him by *Rebecca* to warn him of *Esau's* impending arrival.]

3. בָּאֶשֶׁר רָאָם — *When he saw them.*

[The use of the singular verb רָאָם, he saw them, denotes that] Jacob was the only one who saw them (*Ibn Ezra*). [*Targum Yonasan* implies otherwise; see below.]

They were the angels he had previously seen ascending and descending the ladder of his dream [28:12]. The sense here of בָּאֶשֶׁר רָאָם, when he recognized them, since he had already 'seen' them (*R' Bachya*).

וְהָיָה מַחֲנֵה אֱלֹהִים — *This is a Godly camp.*

This remark was meant to assure those with him: 'These are not the troops of *Esau* or *Laban* coming to attack us; they are camps of holy angels which God sent from on high to protect us from the likes of our enemies' (*Targum Yonasan*; *Targum Yerushalmi*).

The word אֱלֹהִים in this passage is sacred (*Soferim* 4). [I.e., it refers to God, thus the word אֱלֹהִים cannot be interpreted as the ad-

2. Twenty years earlier, when Jacob was on the way from *Isaac's* home to *Laban's*, וַיִּפְגֹּעַ, he [Jacob] encountered the Divine [see *comm.* to 28:11]. Now, the angels encountered him. Then, it was an auspicious event that a man was told by God that it was his mission to make the earth a suitable habitat for the *Shechinah*. Now, when Jacob was finally free from the fetters of *Laban*, the angels were privileged to come and greet him — he represented the first human family that was fitting home for the *Shechinah*.

This follows *R' Bachya* who adds that the angels' mission was to guard Jacob, as in the verse [*Psalms* 91:11]: *For He shall give His angels charge over you to guard you in all your ways. They shall carry you in their hands lest you dash your foot against a stone.*

As the *Midrash* observes: Who is greater, the guardian, or the one who is guarded? Certainly the one who is being guarded. Who is greater, those who carry, or he who is being carried? Certainly the latter. Likewise, Jacob who was being met was greater than those [= the angels] who were meeting him.

jective *mighty* with the passage meaning: this is a mighty camp. See *Sefer HaYashar* in footnote to v. 1: *This is a camp destined to me by God.*]

מַחֲנֵיִם – *Machanaim*.

Lit. a pair of camps referring to the two camps of angels: those who ministered outside the Holy Land who accompanied him thus far, and those of the Holy Land who now came to meet him (*Tanchuma; Rashi*).

This is the Machanaim across the Jordan mentioned in *II Samuel* 17:24, which is part of the Holy Land (*Haamek Davar*, differing from *Ramban*; see *Herchev Davar*).

According to *Ramban* [who differs with the view that the angels were of two categories], the *-im* suffix of the name Machanaim does not necessarily imply a plural since it is common for proper nouns to end with *-im* [as for example *Mitzraim*]. However, if there is a plural connotation to be derived from Machanaim, then it refers to two camps: Jacob's own camp and the camp of the higher beings [angels]. This suggests that both the human and the angelic are camps of God in that both bless Him and assert His unity. [The righteous ones on earth are equated to angels in heaven in their fulfillment of His will (*R' Bachya* 53:2).]

R' Hirsch explains similarly: Jacob and his family and entourage were on their way to a homeland where God would be with them as He had promised. They were a *מַחֲנֵה*, *temporary camp*, in search of God's Presence. The angels, too, were a *camp* in search of something: they sought a human community where God could dwell on earth. When these two camps met, Jacob named the place Machanaim,

the two camps – *מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל*, the camp of Israel, and *מַחֲנֵה אֱלֹהִים*, the camp of God [see *Overview*].

Machanaim was to become one of the most important cities in Gilead. It was a city of Levites [*Josh.* 21:36], the royal city of Ishbosheth son of Saul [*II Sam.* 2:8], and the city where King David settled when he fled from his son Absalom [*ibid.* 17:24, 27]. It was located within Gad's territory, close to that of the half tribe of Menashe in the Trans-jordan [*Jos.* 13:26-30]. Notwithstanding the above references, it is difficult to pinpoint its exact location although it is generally assumed to lay between the streams of Jabbok and Yarmuk in line with Beth She'an (*Hoffmann*).

The *Midrash* cites an opinion that there were sixty myriads [=600,000] of angels who preceded Jacob when he entered the Land since God's Presence does not rest in Its fullness on less than that number [equal to the number of the Israelite camp at Mount Sinai at the Giving of the Torah]. According to the Sages, however, the plural form *Machanaim* implies that there was a double camp: 120 myriads. [See *comm.* to *ArtScroll Shir HaShirim* 7:1 s.v. *בְּמַחֲלֵת הַמַּחֲנֵיִם*, like a dance of the camps.]

According to the Masoretic note appearing at the end of the *Sidrah* there are 148 verses in the *Sidrah* numerically corresponding to the mnemonics *חֲלָקֵי מַחֲנֵיִם*, each of which totals 148. The Jewish People are referred to as God's *חֵלֶק*, *portion*, as in *חֵלֶק ה' יָצָאנוּ*, *HASHEM's portion is His People* [*Deut.* 32:9]. Thus the birth of eleven of the twelve tribes, as described in this *Sidrah* constitutes the nation that God describes as *חֲלָקֵי*. My *portion*. Additionally, the final word of the *Sidrah* is *מַחֲנֵיִם*, *Machanaim*, the name Jacob gave to the place where he saw the two companies of angels. It also alludes to Jacob's abundant, flourishing growth, a condition which he was to describe in 32:11 as having grown into *שְׁנֵי מַחֲנֵיִם*, *two camps*.] The *Haf-torah* begins with *Hoshea* 12:13 *וַיִּבְרַח יַעֲקֹב*.

נשלם סדרה ויצא בעזרת האל

סדר וישלח

Sidrah Vayishlach

— *The Overviews*

Several topics in this Sidrah have been treated in Overviews to earlier volumes. Among them are:

Visions of Exile — *Daniel*

Reuben's sin — *Ruth*

Esau's Monarchy — *Yechezkel*

An Overview —

Jacob — Alone and Secure*

מה הקב"ה כתוב בו וְנִשְׁגָּב ה' לְבָדּוֹ, אִם יַעֲקֹב
וַיִּתֵּר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ

What is written of the Holy One, Blessed be He: HASHEM alone shall be exalted [Isaiah 2:17]. Of Jacob, too, it is written: and Jacob remained alone (Bereishis Rab- bah 77:1).

I. Jacob's Consistency

Contradiction **A**s Ramban notes in his introductory words to *Vayishlach*, this is the chapter of Israel's subjugation to Edom. Jacob's behavior in the face of a mortal threat from the stronger Esau is to guide our conduct in similar circumstances, and his salvation is our assurance that God will save Israel from destruction by Esau's powerful offspring until the eventual complete redemption by Messiah.

Jacob undertook three simultaneous courses: דָּרוֹן, *tribute*, תַּפִּלָּה, *prayer*, and מִלְחָמָה, *battle*. He sent a *tribute* to appease Esau, he *prayed* to God, and prepared to engage in *battle* [Rashi to 32:8; see *comm.*]. At first glance such activities seem to involve contradictory emotions. One who dispatches a lavish tribute to a murderous enemy evidences abject submission; in effect, he humbles himself and throws himself at the mercy of his invincible foe. In preparing for war, he is ready to fight, to kill, and to win, refusing to acknowledge his opponent's supremacy. When someone prays sincerely, he throws his lot with God, manifesting a recognition that neither submission nor armed might can carry the fray — only God determines the outcome of human events.

When someone
prays sincerely, he
throws his lot with
God.

* This Overview is based on a *schmuess* by Harav Gedaliah Schorr זצ"ל.

The average human being *can* adopt three contradictory policies, but because they involve irreconcilable emotional and intellectual responses to a situation, he will not be able to bring total commitment to each of the three. The hopeless pleading for mercy suggested by the tribute will interfere with the total trust that God is the *Master of war* [Exodus 15:3] before Whom an army is but an array of matchsticks; and one who sends groveling tribute can hardly muster the zeal needed for effective combat.

Jacob and Truth It is true, of course, that contradictory actions are commonly undertaken by people, but we all know that many of them are insincere. Jacob was different.

Even where he was forced to make statements that were intended to mislead the listener, he remained as close to the truth as circumstances would allow.

In understanding him at any juncture of his life, we must always recall an axiom that often eludes us: As the epitome of truth, Jacob does not pay mere lip service to ideals; what he says he means. Even where he was forced to make statements that were intended to mislead the listener, he remained as close to the truth as circumstances would allow, so much so that his words in and of themselves were absolutely true if understood properly. Thus, when he presented himself to Isaac saying *אָנֹכִי עֶשָׂו בְּכֹרֶךָ*, *It is I, Esau your firstborn* (27:19), his words could be understood as *literally* true, or as meaning that because of his righteousness and Esau's wickedness, God had decreed that the position originally meant for Esau had been assumed by Jacob [see *comm.* to 27:19]. And when he said that he would eventually come to Esau in Seir [see *comm.* to 33:14], Jacob had in mind the longed for time when Messiah would lead a triumphant Jewish nation to occupy the mountain of Esau.

Indeed because his frequent reference to Esau *אֲדֹנִי עֶשָׂו*, *my lord, Esau*, was so sincere, Jacob suffered for it. *Yalkut Shimoni* declares that because Jacob conferred that title of honor upon Esau eight times during his attempts at appeasement, Esau's descendants produced eight kings before Jacob's produced even one (see 36:31ff). By inculcating

himself with the honest conviction that Esau was indeed his superior, Jacob lowered his own status to the point where Esau could indeed demonstrate a degree of superiority (*Shiurei Daas* part I). Offhand, insincere flattery could not have carried such major implications. Clearly any statement of a Jacob must be taken to reflect the innermost man.

That Jacob could dedicate himself with conviction to three contradictory courses of action is testimony to the greatness of his self-discipline.

That Jacob could dedicate himself with conviction to three contradictory courses of action is testimony to the greatness of his self-discipline. He was able to compartmentalize his emotions to such an extent that he could cast his lot with God, yet not fail to make the necessary human responses to a crisis; to recognize an element of justice in Esau's hurt at losing the blessings, yet prepare for an attack as if there were no defense but his own strong arms. This chapter teaches that Israel in exile must always be willing to recognize the varying and sometimes conflicting elements in any situation. Only in this way can we understand the plight of R' Yannai who always interceded with Rome on behalf of Israel. He never went without studying this chapter — except once, when he suffered disastrous results (see *comm.*). Surely, R' Yannai remembered the events of the chapter at least as well as we do; but there are lessons in Jacob's conduct that are apparent only to people of the highest caliber and even then, only if they rigorously study the chapter in the light of each particular event.

II. Incitement to Evil

Above and Alone The highlight of the chapter is Jacob's combat with the angel of Esau posing as a 'man' [32:25-31]. The narrative tells us that Jacob remained 'alone' whereupon the angel attacked him. Understood superficially, the story is quite straightforward: the angel waited until Jacob was defenseless and vulnerable, whereupon he ambushed him. There are much deeper implications here, however.

וַיִּתְּנָהּ יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ וַיֵּאָכֶל אִישׁ עִמּוֹ ... ר' בְּרַכְיָה

בְּשֵׁם ר' סִימון אומר: אֵין בָּאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל. אֵין בָּאֵל
 וּמִי בָאֵל? יִשְׂרָאֵל, יִשְׂרָאֵל סָבָא. מִהּ הִקְבִּי"ה בְּחֻב
 בּוּ וְנִשְׁבָּה ה' לְבָדּוּ, אִף יַעֲקֹב וַיִּתְּרַר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוּ.
*Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled
 with him ... [32:25]. R' Berachiah said in
 behalf of R' Simon: There is none like the
 God of Israel [Deut. 33:26]. [This means:]
 there is none like God! But who is like
 God? — Israel! This refers to the Patriarch
 Israel [Jacob]. What is written of the Holy
 One Blessed be He: HASHEM alone shall be
 exalted [Isaiah 2:17]. Of Jacob, too, it is
 written: Jacob remained alone (Bereishes
 Rabbah 77:1).*

The Midrash sees a new element in Jacob's isolation. He was, so to speak, as far removed from the mundane affairs of his contemporaries, as glorious in his exaltation on earth, as is God Himself. Man, by nature, is a gregarious animal. He craves company. He may be shy and withdrawn, but his mind is always involved with human beings whether relating to family, business, politics or whatever. He may be alone on a desert island, but his thoughts always drift to human affairs. Jacob was different. He was above all that. As *Chovos Halevavos* says of the חָסִיד, *truly devout person*: Even when he is part of the crowd, his heart and mind are above every concern but what truly matters.

*The angel attacked
 this Jacob — not
 the man, but this
 characteristic of
 rising above every
 situation by
 remaining alone
 even in the midst
 of turmoil.*

The angel attacked *this* Jacob — not the man, but this characteristic of rising above every situation by remaining alone even in the midst of turmoil. Had Jacob been part of the crowd, the angel of evil could easily have ignored him even when he was defenseless; one more man named Jacob is no cause for concern to the forces of evil. It was Jacob's God-like *aloneness* that the angel could not tolerate. That Jacob's image was engraved on the Heavenly Throne [*Chullin* 91a] was proof that no impediment stood between him and the highest level of holiness available to man. When the angel saw a man capable of rising so far above earthly affairs, he had to attack, because the angel of evil exists to prevent such

spiritual accomplishment.

'This relationship between Jacob and God's throne operates in both directions.

This relationship between Jacob and God's Throne operates in both directions. Jacob's image on the Throne is proof enough of his stature, but it also demonstrates that his goal in life was to bring holiness into earthly affairs; he existed to bring that Heavenly image down to earth where it would influence the affairs of man. He was dedicated to removing the barriers that prevent Godliness from finding a home on earth [see Overview to *Vayeitzei*: 'A Tzaddik and His Possessions.']

To the Highest Level The struggle between Jacob and the angel had truly cosmic implications. The *Talmud* derives this from the expression וַיִּאָבֵק, *and he wrestled*, which is related to the word אָבַק, *dust* [32:26]:

אָמַר ר' יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן לֵוִי: מַלְמַד שֶׁהָעֵלָה אָבַק מִרְגְּלוֹתָם עַד כִּסֵּא הַקְּבוֹד.

R' Joshua ben Levi said: This teaches that the dust of their feet rose up to the Throne of Glory (Chullin 91a).

Rashba explains that 'feet' alludes to first causes, 'dust', to the results churned up by an event, and the 'Throne of Glory' refers to the highest possible spiritual levels. The bout between Jacob and the angel had repercussions that went infinitely beyond the sands of Jabbok. The angel succeeded in setting in motion a chain of events that would affect Jacob's offspring thousands of years into the future [see next Overview], and its implications would affect world history until God would take his place on the thrones of judgment revealed to Daniel:

The angel succeeded in setting in motion a chain of events that would affect Jacob's offspring thousands of years in the future.

חֹה הָיִית עַד דִּי בְּרַסְנוֹן רִמְיו וְעֵתִיק יוֹמִין יִתֵּב ...
דִּינָא יִתֵּב וְסִפְרִין פְּתִיחוּ

I [Daniel] watched until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days sat ... The judgment was set and the books were opened (Daniel 7:9-10).

Throughout time the cause-and-effect processes set in motion by their struggle would reverberate, coloring, molding, determining history until God's final day of judgment. In terms of the struggle's intensity,

it extended throughout every spiritual level, from the lowest all the way up to God Himself.

Power to Obscure 'Dust' also represents a dulling, covering substance. A brightly polished object loses its sheen with the first light covering of dust. Eventually, as the dust accumulates on them, gold and clay both look the same. Esau's angel tried to obscure the luster of God's holiness with all the dust of delusion. Why acknowledge God's power if Nature can be put in its place? Why guide one's actions by God's decree if man can assume absolute power? Why accept a Heavenly code of morality if man can adapt a philosophy tailored to his own lusts and preconceptions? Esau's duststorm has spread and risen until it has nearly obscured even the Throne, for those whose eyes see creation through dust-coated lenses. All the while, Jacob labors to cleanse and polish, but the angel battles him.

Evil's very existence is based on this ability to obscure the truth and deceive man into accepting falsehood.

Evil's very existence is based on this ability to obscure the truth and deceive man into accepting falsehood. If man could only realize that Satan's wares are all package and no content! But he doesn't. He sees their surface attractiveness and believes there is depth and legitimacy to Satan's message. And Satan Himself? —

יֵרֵד וּמִתְעַה וְעוֹלָה וּמִרְגִּיז נוֹטֵל רְשׁוֹת וְנוֹטֵל
נִשְׁמָה ... הוּא שָׁטָן הוּא יֵצֵר הָרַע הוּא מְלָאךְ
הַמָּוֶת

[Satan] descends and seduces man [to sin], then he rises to anger [God by prosecuting man for his sinfulness], then he receives permission, and takes man's life ... Satan, the Evil Inclination, and the Angel of Death are one and the same (Bava Basra 16a).

Satan's deceptions succeed in seducing virtually everyone, at least to some extent, for no man lives without falling short of his maximum goals [see *Koheles* 7:20], such are his powers. But Jacob would not be taken in by the surface allures of Satan. The angel persevered; he demonstrated all his might to

But Jacob was superior to him, for he recognized that the fire had come from nothing, that it had no inner value.

Jacob. As the *Midrash* relates the spiritual struggle between the two of them, the angel caused fire to bubble from the ground, whereupon Jacob responded, 'You seek to frighten me with fire? I am all fire,' as Scripture says [*Obadiah* 1:18]: *The house of Jacob shall be a flame ... (Bereishis Rabbah 77:2).* The angel could make a fire come out of nothing. But Jacob was superior to him, for he recognized that the fire had come from nothing, that it had no inner value. But Jacob, himself, who epitomized God's purpose in creating man — Jacob was all spiritual flame.

This *Midrashic* allegory represents the essence of their struggle. The power of evil and the exponent of good peeled away all the outer layers that concealed their respective essences. The angel sought to kick up dust storms that would obscure the ultimate value of things, but Jacob would not be deceived. The angel stormed and flashed, but for every attack Jacob had a response — and his ultimate response was 'You are a sham and I am the truth; you cover your falsehood with a veneer of philosophical, spiritual fire, but I am God's fire.'

III. Perceiving the Essence

Unprecedented Intensity Never before had the fight between good and evil been fought with such intensity, with such a descent into the essence of both sides. This explains Jacob's remark in naming the place in commemoration of his fight with the angel. He said:

כִּי רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים אֶל פָּנִים וַתִּצֵּל נַפְשִׁי
For I have seen the Divine face, yet my life was saved (32:31).

On the surface it seems like a strange remark. Jacob was no stranger to angels; he had seen them in *Eretz Yisrael* and in Charan, he had even sent them as his messengers to Esau. Why was he now so impressed at having survived the sight of an angel? In the light of the above, we understand. The key word is *face*, *face* — a word which also alludes to *פְּנִימִיּוֹת*,

the innermost being. Jacob had seen angels, but he had never before glimpsed the *spiritual essence* of any angel, much less that of the personification of evil. To have survived such a sight is no small accomplishment, it is worthy of being a landmark, even in the life of Jacob.

Truth But Jacob is not done. His attribute, as we know, is
Eternal אמת, *truth*. The emanation following truth is נצח, *eternity*, a word which also has the connotation of נצחון, *victory*. The concepts of truth, eternity, and triumph are closely related. Truth can never accept defeat, because no false victor can ever endure. By definition, truth *must* be eternal, because if it were ever to change, it could never have been true. Because truth is eternal it must triumph in the long run, even if the crowd accepts the alluring goddess of falsehood. God's purpose in creating evil was that it should be defeated. Satan has the mission of attempting to deceive man so that man should reach deep into his spiritual resources and refuse to believe the lie. In the long distance race of life, the purpose of such obstacles is that the racer should succeed in hurdling them. If man falls over each successive obstacle, the run is a failure. Satan places every manner of hindrance in man's path, but Satan, too, recognizes God's will; he, too, longs for the man who will face him down, for the man who will respond to surface fire with inner fire.

God's purpose in creating evil was that it should be defeated.

When the angel was defeated he said to Jacob:

שלחני ... מלאך אני ומיום שנבראתי לא הגיע
 זמני לומר שירה צד עבשיו

Let me go ... I am an angel, and from the day I was created until now, my time had not come to recite songs of praise [before God] (Chullin 91b).

An angel's existence is its mission. It was created for mission, it exists for a mission, and its 'song of praise' to God is the successful completion of its mission. The angel of evil had been created by God from the beginning with the mission of surrounding itself with a false fire intended to test man — but God

..
The man whose
image graced
God's Throne had
vindicated
creation.

wants man to resort to his inner store of true fire, and defeat the angel. Finally, the angel had totally fulfilled its mission. It had faced Jacob with every wile, argument, and force at its command, and it had been vanquished by the power of truth. The man whose image graced God's Throne had vindicated creation, so now Satan could ascend to God not to prosecute man, anger God, and obtain permission to slay the straying soul, but to sing the praise of the man — God's man — who had overcome humans and defeated angels.

That done, Esau had no power to harm Jacob who could now proceed on his way into *Eretz Yisrael*. As *Ramban* explains, this alludes to Israel's ultimate emergence from all manner of persecution. In his portentous life, Jacob symbolized all the future exiles of Israel, but he also symbolized that Israel might suffer but would never be defeated; in the end, its exile would end and it would enjoy the fruits of its victory over evil.

The Essential Trait It was Jacob's greatness that provoked the angel to engage him in the climactic battle. The trait that exemplified his greatness was his **aloneness!** — נִיחָר — יַעֲקֹב לְבֶדּוּ, *Jacob was left alone*. Jacob could elevate himself above exigencies and remain above every condition that threatened to pull him from the Throne of Glory to the gutter of material values. That quality had to survive in order for Israel to survive. Even Balaam saw that:

... הֵן עַם לְבֶדֶד יֹשֵׁב וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב
... behold it is a nation that dwells apart;
among the nations it does not reckon itself
(Numbers 23:9).

Throughout our history, Israel in its greatest moments has been proud of and treasured its uniqueness. The nation that was chosen to be priestly and holy has no need to prove that it could imitate the nations. To the contrary, Israel could serve them best by holding itself separate, the better to fulfill the mission for which Abraham's seed had been chosen. The bulk of the decrees and prohibitions found in the

Talmud have the purpose of maintaining Israel's separation to avoid intermarriage and adoption of non-Jewish ways of life. The same is true of the body of sacred Jewish custom that has been built over the centuries. This quality was stressed by Moses in his final words:

וַיִּשְׁבֶּן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּטָח בָּרָדָר

And Israel shall dwell secure, apart (Deut. 33:28).

To the extent that it is apart, it will be secure; to the extent that it seeks to become united with the nations, it will be insecure.

So vital is this isolation to the survival of Israel, that God imposes it if Israel fails to see its wisdom.

So vital is this isolation to the survival of Israel, that God imposes it if Israel fails to see its wisdom. *Meshech Chochmah* [Lev. 26:44] describes the entire panorama of Jewish history in exile in these terms: We are a bedraggled, wandering rabble forced from our home in a helpless and pitiful fate. We establish homes and communities in a new land, build our Torah and religious institutions to an undreamed of extent. Then, as time goes on, we look outward at our host society and seek to become accepted by it and eventually to become part of it. Eventually we make it our source of culture, we say 'Berlin is the true Jerusalem.' With these fearfully prophetic words, *Meshech Chochmah* says that God is left with only one way to preserve us — he must turn our hosts against us, have *them* remind us who we are, even expel us. Painful, tragic — but, in that way we are forced to preserve our identity, and begin the process anew. There is no better explanation for mindless anti-Semitism. It is God's preservative for His people. As David says of Egypt's hatred of the Jews who contributed so much to their land: הָפַךְ לָבָם לִשְׂנֹא עֲנָו, *He [God] transformed their heart to hate His people (Psalms 105:25).*

As the days of Messiah draw closer, may we heed Jacob's lesson. A Jew is different. He is above the fray and, because he is, he triumphs.

An Overview —

..Torah—Satan's Objective

הָלוֹאִי אֲנִי עֲזָבוּ וְתוֹרַתִּי שָׁמְרוּ — שְׂאִילוּ תוֹרַתִּי
שָׁמְרוּ ... הִיטָה מְחִוִּרָן אֶצְלִי

[God says,] if only they had forsaken Me but observed [the study of] My Torah ... it would have brought them back to Me (Yalkut Shimoni Jeremiah 282).

... כְּעוֹבֵד בּוֹכְבִּים נִדְמָה לוֹ ... בְּתִלְמִיד חָכָם
נִדְמָה לוֹ

[The angel] seemed like an idolator [to Jacob] ... He seemed like a Torah scholar to him (Chullin 91a).

I. The Angel's Victory

The
First
Target

The 'man' who struggled with Jacob was not a human being, nor was he an ordinary angel. As Rashi comments, the 'man' was Samael, the guardian angel of Esau. The Sages teach that Samael represents evil as does no other angel [see preceding Overview]. If that is Samael, then we can understand why he tried to destroy Jacob. He was fighting not merely Esau's twin brother, not merely the brother who had gained the blessings sought by Esau, not merely the heir to the inheritance Esau coveted — he was fighting the man who climaxed the Patriarchal tradition. Jacob was *הַחוּט הַמְשֻׁלָּשׁ לֹא בַמַּהֲרָה יִנָּתֵק*, the *tripled-thread* [which] will not be broken easily (Koheles 4:12). Because Jacob combined within himself the qualities of all three Patriarchs, he was the unyielding, unbreakable pillar upon which the Jewish future could be built.

Because Jacob combined within himself the qualities of all three Patriarchs, he was the unyielding, unbreakable pillar upon which the Jewish future could be built.

That Esau's angel had to fight Jacob, we understand. What is difficult, however, is why the power

* This section of the Overview is based on an essay by Harav Elchanan Wasserman הי"ד.

Why did it wait
until triply-strong
Jacob came on the
scene instead of
mounting an
offensive against
Abraham or Isaac?

of evil waited so long? Why did it wait until triply-strong Jacob came on the scene instead of mounting an offensive against Abraham or Isaac? Of course, it is an overstatement to say that Abraham and Isaac went unmolested by the power of evil. They had tests and obstacles — indeed, the most difficult of Abraham's ten tests, the *Akeidah*, was prompted by Satan's insistence that Abraham's devotion to God was not without limit [see *Overview to ArtScroll Tashlich*]. But the fiercest, most direct onslaught was against Jacob. Why?

The analogy of armies at war will help us understand. Two worthy countries will win and lose their share of battles. Even a major defeat will not force the surrender of the loser provided its war-making capacity is not mortally struck. Military history is filled with stories of countries that lost battle after battle, but were still able to come back to counter-attack and win. But once a combatant's capacity to fight is destroyed, the war is over. In medieval combat, victory belonged to the warrior who could unsword or unhorse his opponent. In modern conventional warfare, a major objective is to cripple the military-industrial complex of the enemy; if it could not build and transport the implements of war, it could not fight. Remove the antagonist's means of warfare, and his defeat is assured.

Man — particularly Israel — is locked in constant war with his Evil Inclination. God says, *בְּרֵאתִי יֵצֶר, הָרַע בְּרֵאתִי לוֹ תוֹרָה תְּכַלִּין*, *I have created the Evil Inclination, I have created Torah as its antidote* (*Kid-dushin* 30b). The Sages teach that Israel's most far-reaching sin is neglect of Torah study. This is derived from a verse in *Jeremiah*:

... עַל מָה אֶבְרָה הָאָרֶץ נִצְתָה בַּמֶּדְבָּר מְבֵלִי
עֲבַרְיָ וַיֹּאמֶר ה' עַל עֲוֹנָם אֶת תּוֹרָתִי ... מְצִינוּ
שׁוֹמֵר הַקֶּבֶ"ה עַל ע"ו עַל ג' עַל וְעַל שִׁיד וְלֹא וְתֵר
עַל מַאֲסָה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה ... הִלּוּאִי אֶתִּי עֲזָבוּ וְתוֹרָתִי
שָׁמְרוּ — שָׁאֲלוּ תוֹרָתִי שָׁמְרוּ מִתּוֹךְ שֶׁהָיוּ
מִתְעַסְקִין בָּהּ הֵימָּה מִסּוּיָרָן אֲצִלִּי

... *Why was the land destroyed, left desolate as a desert without passerby?*

HASHEM said, 'Because they forsook My Torah ... (Jeremiah 9:11-12). We find that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overlooked idolatry, adultery, and bloodshed, but He would not overlook the debasement of Torah ... [God says] if only they had forsaken Me but observed [the study of] My Torah — for if they had observed My Torah, as a result of having involved themselves with it, it would have brought them back to Me (Yalkut Shimoni Jeremiah 282).

Such is the spiritual strength inherent in the study of Torah that it can affect even sinners: שְׁחֵמָאוֹר שְׂכָה מְחַוִּיכָן לְמוֹטֵב, for the spiritual illumination within it will bring them back to righteousness (Yerushalmi Chagigah 1:7). Torah represents the Jews' capacity to fight the war against evil. Compared to the absolutely vital nature of Israel's adherence to the study of Torah, the important struggles to strengthen observance of individual commandments take on the nature of skirmishes in a constant battle. Skirmishes are significant, but they are not equivalent to the life-and-death struggle to defend the indispensable capacity to continue fighting.

Torah represents the Jews' capacity to fight the war against evil.

But Not Torah Satan is like a chief-of-staff planning his overall strategy. He prefers not to lose a division, a platoon, not even a sentry. But he knows that some losses are inevitable. And he knows further that no victory matters more than one that destroys the heart of the enemy's fighting ability. That being so, he will be prepared to allow the enemy spectacular advances and victories, as long as they do not interfere with the overall strategy.

This attitude is not limited to the military field. All large and most small enterprises operate in the same manner. A country undertakes measures to improve its standard of living or overcome economic reverses. No policy can be successful in every area; the intelligent, strong leader is ready to accept hardship, as long as he is convinced that the long-term goals will

be met. Parents decide how they wish to raise their children. Whatever course they choose will require at least some agony along the way, but if they re-order their goals every time their child faces a painful obstacle, they will merely trade one difficulty for another and sacrifice the goal in the long run. Satan has a goal, as well. The goal is to destroy Israel's capacity to achieve God's purpose. Can Satan succeed without a single defeat? No intelligent general expects that, nor does Satan. So he adopts the wise course of assigning priorities to his objectives. What are his priorities?

The *Chofetz Chaim* used to say, 'The Evil Inclination doesn't mind if a Jew fasts, weeps, and prays all day long — provided he does not study Torah!'

Abraham represented kindness and Isaac represented service. Those are mighty pillars of the world (*Avos* 1:2), but they are not the crucial ones. Jacob represented Torah — and without Torah, the battle is lost.

Too many tragic eras in our history bear this out. In many countries, Jews contributed heroically to every manner of charity — food, clothing, health care, recreation, social services. They erected magnificent synagogues and maintained ancient traditions of lengthy and fervid services. But they failed to invest equivalent dedication in Torah institutions. The result was a steady erosion in the quality of their Jewish life — all too often ending in near total assimilation. Such Jewish communities fell by the wayside. Only communities that put primary emphasis on Torah study for adults and Torah education for children were able to survive and thrive despite exile and the blandishments of surrounding society.

Jacob, as the personification of Torah striving and achievement, *had* to be the prime target of Satan.

Only communities
that put primary
emphasis on Torah
study for adults
and Torah
education for
children were able
to survive and
thrive.

Students Although the angel could not defeat Jacob, he succeeded in injuring his thigh. Like so much else in the lives of the Patriarchs, this was portentous of the nation's future. The thigh symbolizes two categories:
and
Patrons

(a) because it is in the area of the reproductive organs, it alludes to future generations, and (b) because the body is supported by its legs, Jacob's thigh represents the factors that provide support to Torah institutions. Jacob — and in turn the future nation — was shown that Satan would not rest. He had failed to defeat Jacob, but he would have a measure of future success in these two areas.

*Times would come
— and have come
— when Jacob's
ideal, Torah
education, would
be under siege.
Jacob's offspring
would be torn
from their
dedication to
Torah.*

Times would come — and *have* come — when Jacob's ideal, Torah education, would be under siege. Jacob's offspring would be torn from their dedication to Torah. A variety of challenges and temptations would arise to 'prove' to them that other activities and other forms of intellectual stimulation were more desirable. Jewish philanthropy, the strong, muscular legs that had supported Torah in all its wanderings, would look around and see 'better' places for its largesse. Funds which should have flowed to Torah institutions would be directed toward causes that would seem to be 'more worthwhile.'

These new courses of action would seem to be not only eminently logical, but utterly compelling. Such are the wiles of Satan that he is most powerful when he does not mount frontal assaults. The *Vilna Gaon* teaches that the people are most vulnerable to sin under two conditions, both of which do not appear to be open rebellions against God's will. Sometimes, Satan's course will be presented as a *mitzvah*, as the greatest benefit for the individual and the community. Or, one may know that his course is wrong, but he may be swept along by a powerful tide of general practice and opinion. Can — dare — someone antagonize his neighbors and community for the sake of conscience? Shouldn't conscience move over for the sake of peace and general acceptance? Such have been the arguments that attack Jacob's thigh — his Torah students and their supporters — at various times throughout history, and especially when the potential for Exile's end draws closer and closer (*Even Shlomo*).

*Shouldn't
conscience move
over for the sake
of peace and
general
acceptance?*

II. Duplicitous Kidnapper

In Two Guises

ר' שמואל בר נחמני אָמר: כְּעוֹבֵד כּוֹכָבִים נִדְּמָה לוֹ ... רָבָא בַר עוּלָא אָמר: כְּתַלְמִיד חָכָם נִדְּמָה לוֹ
R' Shmuel bar Nachmani said: [The angel] seemed like an idolator [to Jacob] ... Rava bar Ula said: He seemed like a Torah scholar to him (Chullin 91a).

The seductive power of Esau's angel was an element of the very first confrontation with Jacob. An enemy as powerful as an Esau, and certainly an angel with the powerful force of evil behind him, would be a formidable enough adversary for Jacob. Certainly the millenia-long struggle between Jacob and Esau that was portended by that struggle at Jabbok would have been terrifying enough for Jacob's descendants even if we were to know the evil nature of the enemy. But we don't.

Jacob saw someone in front of him. It was an angel in human form, but in what guise did he appear? The *Talmud* gives two versions: He may have appeared in the form of an idolator seeking to attack everything Jacob stood for, or he may have appeared as a Torah scholar sharing Jacob's very own goals. The two viewpoints of the *Talmud* are not in conflict. Esau's angel *does* appear in both forms. His role is to convince Israel to neglect its mission by whatever means may be effective. He may bare his fangs as a bitter enemy seeking to uproot all of Israel's values, like Rome in R' Akiva's time, Spain with its Inquisition, Russia with its czars and commissars, Germany with its Crusades and Holocaust. Or he may come with a smile and a kiss as Esau did when he finally met Jacob, and as other nations have done with the expressed or implied message: 'Come join us and become part of us. Tear down your walls of separation and we shall demolish our ghettos. Our schools, businesses, agencies, and homes are open to you. The world we share is too small for us to be divided.'

*His role is to
convince Israel to
neglect its mission
by whatever
means may be
effective.*

The angel of evil is indeed both, and because he is, he varies his methods to suit the needs of the situation.

The name of Esau's angel alludes to this dual identity, this mixture of good and evil. His name is סַמְאֵל, *Samael*, a combination of the two words סָם, *poison*, and אֵל, *a Godly angel*. The angel of evil is indeed both, and because he is, he varies his methods to suit the needs of the situation. When he confronted Jacob he came as both, but when Jacob defeated him, he dropped his guise of the fearsome idolator and adopted the pose of the angel insisting that Jacob release him to sing God's praises. Moreover, he insisted, as *Rashi* notes [see *comm.*] that from that moment of his creation, he had been awaiting this very dawn, the very first time he was to be given the privilege of praising God. This, too, was part of his ruse; having lost, let him lull the *tzaddik* with protestations of innocence and friendship, until the time was ripe to strike again.

The angel was indeed a kidnapper who, having failed in his primary goal of subjugating Jacob himself, sought to inflict mortal damage on the Jewish future by contaminating Jewish children.

When the angel begged for permission to leave, Jacob restrained him saying derisively, קוֹבִי וסִטֶּס, *are you a kidnapper [that you fear the light of day]? (ibid., Rashi)*. Jacob's choice of invective was most apt. The angel was indeed a kidnapper who, having failed in his primary goal of subjugating Jacob himself sought to inflict mortal damage on the Jewish future by contaminating Jewish children. This he symbolized by the wound he inflicted on Jacob — he wrenched loose the area of the body from which new generations are born. Truly have our Sages seen throughout the ages that the main battleground between Jacob and Esau, between good and evil, is the Jewish child. Jacob spent a lifetime of preparation, hard labor, and exile to produce a generation that was totally righteous; Esau's angel sought, seeks, and will seek until the End of Days to uproot it by anger or by guile, by cruelty or by generosity, by the lash or by the kiss (*Sh'lah HaKadosh, Vayishlach*).

The Sinew and the Day

The masters of Kabbalah have taught that the 248 positive commandments and the 248 organs and limbs [רַמ"ח אַבְרָיִם] are physical manifestations of higher spiritual entities. Each *mitzvah* provides the

The 365 negative commandments, like the number of major sinews and blood vessels and the 365 days of the solar year, are earthly manifestations of 365 spiritual forces of strict judgment.

spiritual sustenance of a specific part of the body and, in turn, the good deed and the limb performing its function have beneficial effects on high. The 365 negative commandments, like the number of major sinews and blood vessels [שָׁסֵיִם גִּידִין] and the 365 days of the solar year, are earthly manifestations of 365 spiritual forces of strict judgment. The observance of a particular negative commandment has the effect of restraining the destructive effect of Heavenly judgment on its particular day of the year.

Which day is intertwined with the commandment not to eat הֶנֶשֶׁה גִּיד, *the Sinew of the thigh*? According to the Kabbalah, that day is *Tishah B'Av*, the day of Jewish suffering. Samael, the angel of evil, tried every possibility to harm Jacob. Nowhere could he succeed except in that one place — his success meant that the Ninth of Av had been touched and contaminated by the forces of evil. Having fallen, at least to a degree, under the sway of evil, *Tishah B'Av* became prey to the forces of judgment throughout the ages [see *Overview to ArtScroll Eichah*] (*Sh'lah HaKadosh, Vayishlach*).

But let them be loyal to Torah and Satan will have no sway.

It may well be that the sources of these destructions lay in the angel's ability to affect Jacob's progeny. Only if Torah students and their patrons are swayed by Satan can *Tishah B'Av* be his day of joyful triumph. Let those who study and those who support them be weakened in their loyalty to the Torah represented by Jacob and tears will continue to flow. But let them be loyal to Torah and Satan will have no sway. May the sacrifices endured by Jacob to produce his own perfect generations be translated into the new generations that will forever remove the blemish of the sinew and the tragedy-laden day it inaugurated.

— Rabbi Nosson Scherman

סדר וישלח

Sidrah Vayishlach

וישלח יעקב מלאכים לפניו אל-עשו
 לב/רה ה אחיו ארצה שער שדה אדום: ויצו

SIDRAH VAYISHLACH

4. Jacob dispatches angels to Esau.

This episode is recorded to illustrate how God sent an angel to save His servant from the hand of a stronger enemy. Furthermore, it shows that Jacob did not rely on his own righteousness, but strove mightily, by taking practical measures to ensure his safety ...

Additionally, the story applies to future generations, since everything that happened to Jacob with his brother Esau foreshadows the future experiences of Israel with Esau's descendants. [This is consistent with Ramban's view that the events in the lives of the Patriarchs presaged events that would occur to their descendants (cf. footnote to 12:6, p. 436).] Accordingly, we should follow his example by making a threefold preparation in our struggles with Esau's descendants [=Edom; an allusion to the nations in whose lands we are currently exiled]; through the means of prayer (see v. 10); gifts [=appeasement] (see v. 13); and battle (see v. 9) as shall be noted in the commentary (Ramban).

וישלח יעקב מלאכים לפניו — Then [lit. and] Jacob sent angels ahead of him.

In order to simultaneously impress and terrify Esau (Midrash).

The word מלאכים may equally refer to angels or human emissaries. The translation angels follows Rashi.

Rashi's view that Jacob sent actual angels follows an opinion in the Midrash. This is supported by the continuity of the narrative, since in the previous verses מלאכים refers to the angels who had come to escort Jacob. He

apparently dispatched some of these angels. This is suggested by the apparently superfluous לפניו, ahead of him [lit. before him] a word which does not occur in parallel passages which speak of human emissaries, as for example: Numbers 20:14, 21:21; Josh. 7:22; Judges 9:31. Accordingly, לפניו implies that he selected from those מלאכים who were before him — i.e., the aforementioned accompanying angels (Cf. Mizrahi; Gur Aryeh; Levush; Tzeidah laDerech; Kli Yakar).

R' Bachya suggests that we may infer that they were angels from v. 7 which states that the 'malachim' returned, without even having mentioned that they left — suggesting that they accomplished their mission in a fleeting moment as only angels can; they had hardly left when they returned.

Ibn Ezra, Radak, and Ralbag following the other view in the Midrash — and apparently also Onkelos who does not render מלאכים, angels, but אוננים, runners, messengers — explain that these were human emissaries selected from among Jacob's servants.

According to one opinion in Tanchuma, Jacob wanted to dispatch human emissaries to meet Esau. All of Jacob's men, however, were afraid to accept the mission. Jacob therefore sent angels [possibly ministering angels, to escort the human emissaries (Etz Yosef).]

This teaches that the righteous are greater than even the ministering angels, for when Jacob had a mission to accomplish he summoned ministering angels and they performed his bidding (Tanchuma).

Jacob allowed himself to dispatch angels because he viewed God's having sent him these angels for no apparent reason at that moment as a Providential sign that they were intended for this very purpose (Midrash; Akeidas Yitzchak).

⁴ Then Jacob sent angels ahead of him to Esau his brother to the land of Seir, the field of Edom.

אל עשו אחיו — To Esau his brother.

Though he was Esau, he was still his brother [and Jacob hoped he would treat him as such] (*Midrash*).

Why did Jacob risk rekindling old hatred by initiating this contact?

According to Ramban, since Isaac lived in the southern part of Canaan [see 24:62] near Edom, Jacob had to pass through or near Edom on his return journey [see comm. to v. 1]. He feared that Esau would learn of his presence, and he therefore took the initiative of sending messengers to conciliate him. The Sages in the *Midrash* criticized Jacob for 'taking the dog by the ears' [since apparently Jacob could have taken a different route and avoided Esau entirely]: '... Esau was going about his business and you send him messengers to say, "Thus said your servant Jacob." [By so doing, of your own accord you make yourself his servant]!' Ramban observes additionally that the Hasmonean kings similarly brought about the downfall of the Jewish state during the Second Temple by sending ambassadors to seek a political alliance with Rome [=Edom]. The result was that Rome took control of the country.

According to the *Zohar*, Jacob took the initiative in attempting a reconciliation now because he felt that it would be advantageous to confront the situation while Isaac was still alive. Esau had great respect for their father — Jacob reasoned — and would never do anything to grieve him [see 27:41].

Following the selection from *Sefer HaYashar* cited in the footnote to v. 1, Jacob's action was not at his own initiative but in compliance with the advice of his mother's delegation which had warned him of Esau's rekindled intentions to kill him. [This also explains how Jacob knew of Esau's whereabouts.]

Abarbanel suggests that Jacob met a caravan traveling north from Seir. They apprised him that Esau had fortified himself with four hundred men and was preparing a military action against him. [These members of the caravan, according to Abarbanel, were the מלאכי אלהים, (human) emissaries of God, referred to above. Jacob considered them to have been dispatched by God because they forewarned him. Accordingly, he sent emissaries to intercept Esau and assuage him.]

ארצה שער — To the land of Seir.

[The region encompassing the mountainous regions from the Dead Sea southward toward the Gulf of Aqaba. It was the home of Esau and his Edomite descendants (see 14:6). This was the fertile land alluded to in Isaac's blessing (see Radak cited in 27:39).]

The word ארצה is synonymous with לוארץ, to the land. The ל prefix [to indicate to], is often replaced in Scripture with the suffix ה. [Thus: מוציא=מחצית; מוציא=מחצית;] (*Rashi* citing *Yevamos* 13b).

שדה אדום — The field of Edom.

I.e., to the particular region of the land of Seir that was inhabited by Esau [=Edom (see 25:30; 36:8)]. It was referred to as the field [=region or plain] of Edom, to distinguish it from the other regions of Seir which were still inhabited by the Seirites.

Originally, Seir the Horite inhabited the entire land named after him [see 14:6; 36:20]. At about this time Esau went to Seir, which was noted for its excellent hunting grounds, and dwelt in the plain — here referred to as the field of Edom — apparently because the inhabitants of the fortified mountain of Seir would not let him settle higher

אתם לאמר כה תאמרון לאדני לעשו
כה אמר עבדך יעקב עם־לִבְנִי גִרְתִּי

וישלה
לבה

up. Esau's children and wives, however, remained in Canaan, and Esau would commute between these residences in order to honor his father and to supply his needs. After Jacob returned to Canaan, Esau moved his whole family to Seir. Eventually he conquered the entire region — including Mount Seir — driving away the Horites and making it his principal residence [36:8]. It remained Esau's possession by Divine sanction [see *Deut.* 2:5; 2:21] (*Midrash Aggadas Bereishis*; *Ramban* to 36:6; *Sforno* here; *Haamek Davar*).

Chizkuni suggests that Esau obtained this region as a dowry when he married Oholibamah, a great-granddaughter of Seir [see 36:20-25]. It was referred to as *field* to allude to Esau's vocation as a *man of the field* [25:27] and hunter.

Although the *field of Edom* was not yet, as noted, Esau's *permanent* residence, Jacob was apparently aware that Esau visited there regularly, and would now be there (*HaRechasim leBik'ah*).

5. לאמר — [And] he charged them as follows [lit. to say]:

Jacob told his messengers לאמר, to give the following message *verbatim*, in his name, so Esau would realize that the message was exactly as Jacob had uttered it, and that the emissaries were adding nothing of their own (*Or HaChaim*).^[1]

[The general intent of Jacob's message, as we shall see, is to appease Esau. Jacob attempts in subtle ways to impress Esau that he had not benefited from his purchase of the birthright or from Isaac's blessing. Jacob still renders him the honor due an older brother, and Esau's continued hatred is therefore unjustified. Jacob tries to represent himself, his experiences, and his condition as insignificant.]

עשו — Thus shall you say, 'To my lord, to Esau.'

The punctuation of the translation follows *Radak* and *Or HaChaim* who comment that it was Jacob's intention that his emissaries make clear to Esau that he, Jacob, always referred to him as 'my lord, Esau.'

Ramban suggests that Jacob commanded them to begin their message by saying these words: 'To my lord Esau.' Jacob meant for them to imply: 'We are our lord Esau's' — i.e., 'we belong to our lord Esau', or: 'we were dispatched to our lord Esau'. Support for this interpretation is in v. 18 where Jacob ordered his people to answer Esau's questions regarding the the lavish gift by saying: '... it is a present sent to my lord Esau'. Thus, Jacob wanted Esau to understand that he was held in the highest esteem and respect by Jacob and his entire retinue.

... By recording this, the Torah

1. *Midrash Lekach Tov* understands לאמר, to say, as implying that the passage contains a message for future generations as well: To say — i.e., to future generations that [in their dealings with Esau's descendants] they should, in a figurative sense, not stand stiffly in front of the approaching wave, for whoever does so will be engulfed; rather they should bend, for if one bends the wave will pass over him. [Comp. exegesis to לאמר in 28:20 and parallels cited there.]

32 ⁵ He charged them as follows: 'Thus shall you say,
5-6 "To my lord Esau. So said your servant Jacob: I have
lodged with Laban and have lingered until now. ⁶ I

teaches that one must accord honor to royalty (R' Bachya).

Alternately, the phrase 'to my lord, to Esau' was not part of what the emissaries directly quoted, but Jacob's third person reference to his brother. Jacob referred to Esau gratuitously as *my lord* in the presence of his emissaries to impress upon them Esau's commanding position so that they, in turn, would address him accordingly (*Ibn Ezra*). Furthermore, by referring to Esau as 'my lord,' Jacob cautioned them indirectly not to speak of Esau in any but a respectful manner even when not in his presence (*Ramban*).

עֲבָדְךָ יַעֲקֹב — Your servant Jacob.

Jacob paid Esau this honor by referring to him as *my lord* and to himself as *your servant*. Jacob emphasized thereby that notwithstanding the transfer of the birth-right and Isaac's blessings — the reasons for Esau's hatred — the younger brother still honored the older brother [see *Kesubos* 103a and *comm.* to *Exodus* 20:12]. Accordingly, the implication was that Esau had no cause to hate him since Jacob did not consider the sale to be binding (*Ramban*).^[1]

Jacob was basically sincere in this matter; already earlier he had decided to leave the benefit of the blessing to his descendants, and to reserve it as a legacy for the future (*Zohar*).

The Sages in the *Midrash* nevertheless took Jacob to task for demeaning himself before his wicked brother Esau:

When Jacob called Esau 'my lord' the Holy One, Blessed be He said to him: 'You have abased yourself and referred to Esau as *my lord* eight times. I will accordingly raise up eight kings of his descendants before your descendants [will have their first king]!' (See *genealogy* in 36:31).

[See also *Midrash* cited by *Ramban* in v. 4, and footnote to 25:23 (page 1057): Because Jacob so utterly demeaned himself notwithstanding God's promise that the elder shall serve the younger (25:23), God caused his words to materialize — Esau's descendants dominate Jacob's in this world, while Jacob's will dominate Esau's in the World to Come.]

עַם-לֶכֶן גִּרְתִּי — I have lodged with Laban.

The verb גִּרְתִּי, lodged, implies staying as a stranger [גר=alien].

— I was but an alien and had no

1. R' Yehudah the Prince, the president of the *Sanhedrin*, once instructed R' Afes to write a letter in his name to the Roman Emperor Antoninus.

R' Afes began the letter with the words: 'From Judah the Prince to our lord the Emperor Antoninus.'

When R' Yehudah read the letter, he tore it up and wrote instead: 'From your servant Yehudah to our lord the Emperor Antoninus.'

'Why do you treat your honor so lightly?' R' Afes asked.

'Am I better than the Patriarch Jacob?' R' Yehudah countered. 'Did he not instruct his men to say, thus said your servant Jacob?' (*Midrash*).

R' Bachya adds that when Antoninus received the letter he responded, 'Are you then my servant? If only I could be your servant in the World to Come!'

— 'No,' R' Yehudah replied. 'Neither am I greater than my ancestor [Jacob], nor are you less worthy than your ancestor [Esau], for Jacob similarly sent to Esau saying, Thus said your servant Jacob.'

וּשְׁלַח לְבוֹי
וְאָחֵר עַד-עֵתָהּ: וַיְהִי-לִי שׁוֹר וַחֲמֹר
צֶאֱן וְעֶבֶד וְשִׁפְחָה וְאֲשֻׁלָּחָה לְהַגִּיד
וּלְאֲדֹנָי לְמִצְוֹתָיִךְ בְּעֵינַיִךְ: וַיִּשְׁבוּ

rest. Indeed, *by day I was consumed by the scorching heat, and at night by the frost* [31:40] (*Lekach Tov*).

I have become neither a great prince nor have I achieved status ... I remained merely an alien. Therefore, you need not hate me for Father's blessing [27:29]: *Be a lord to your kinsmen*, since it has not been fulfilled in me. Another interpretation: the numerical value of the word גָּרְתִּי equals תְּרִיג, 613, as if to intimate: *Though I have lodged (גָּרְתִּי) with Laban, I have observed 613 Divine Commandments*, and have not learned from his evil ways (*Rashi*).

Both interpretations offered by *Rashi* are not mutually exclusive, but complement one another: The blessings have been ineffective for me; I achieved no prominence in spite of them but remained merely a גָּר, *alien*, throughout my long period with Laban. However, do not think that the blessings were ineffective because I was not worthy; on the contrary: תְּרִיג מִצְוֹת שְׁמַרְתִּי, *I observed all 613 precepts*, while with Laban, and I still remained but a גָּר, *alien*. Obviously, then, father's blessing can rest only upon you for whom they were originally intended. Therefore, you have no further cause to hate me (*Kli Yakar*).

Minchah Belulah interprets Jacob's allusion to the 613 commandments as an indirect way of conveying another message to Esau: 'Isaac promised you that if I fail to observe the Torah, you will throw off my yoke (see 27:40). Do not trifle with me, Esau, for I remain loyal to the commandments.'

That Jacob married two sisters does not conflict with his describing himself here as fulfilling all 613 precepts – which included the prohibition of such marriages [*Lev.*

18:18]. Since Jacob undertook these marriages with Divine sanction, in effect, even this was in compliance with the Torah (*Gur Aryeh*).

Levush holds that having been weaned from their father's idolatrous ways, Rachel and Leah were considered as converts, who have the halachic status of newborn children without former familial ties. Thus they were not legally sisters when Jacob married them. [See *comm.* on page 1083: 'To what extent the Patriarchs observed the Torah', and *Gur Aryeh's comm.* on page 1084. Cf. also footnotes to 29:28, and to 35:19.]

[Regarding Jacob's anxiety over having been absent from Eretz Yisrael and deprived of the *mitzvah* of honoring his parents (noted in the *Midrash* and *Da'as Zekeinim* to v. 8), we might conjecture that since his initial departure was at his parents' command, even in his absence he may be regarded as having honored them, and hence rightfully claim that he observed all 613 *mitzvos*. However, it is difficult to reconcile this with the fact that because of his staying away from his father's service, Jacob was punished with the similar extended absence of his beloved son Joseph. וַיִּצְיָע.]

Chemdos HaYamim explains the application of Jacob's remark to be: I accept upon my posterity the obligation to observe all 613 commandments.

According to *Rashbam*: 'I have been staying with Laban – as you know, at the command of Father and Mother.' Jacob said this so that Esau should not think that he had fled because of him.

Alshich interprets the connotation to be: 'Do not think I am merely a naive tent-dweller! I survived these twenty years with the rogue Laban!'

וְאָחֵר עַד-עֵתָהּ – *And [I] have lingered until now.*

– Therefore I have not come to pay my respects to you sooner (*Sforno*).

have acquired oxen and donkeys, sheep, servants, and maidservants and I am sending to tell my lord to gain favor in your eyes.”’

Until now — that is, until Joseph, Esau’s adversary, was born (*Tanchuma*). [For as noted in the *comm.* to 30:25, it was only after the birth of Joseph whom Jacob prophetically saw was destined to be Esau’s adversary, that Jacob felt he could safely return home and brave Esau’s wrath.]

R’ Hirsch comments that Jacob was informing Esau that his living and working conditions with Laban were so unreasonably difficult that he had to struggle for twenty years before he could accumulate whatever possessions he now had. Esau should recognize, therefore, that this twenty-year history should be sufficient atonement for any past grievances he had been nursing.

וַיְהִי לִי שׁוֹר וַחֲמֹר צֶאֱן וְעֶבֶד. וְשִׁפְחָה — [And] I have acquired [lit. there was to me] oxen and donkeys, sheep, servants and maidservants.

My father blessed me with the dew of the heavens and the fatness of the earth [27:28] — but my human and animal possessions come from neither heaven or earth [so, in effect, the presence of these flocks does not negate my earlier contention that Father’s blessings have not been fulfilled; these possessions did not come to me as a result of his *blessings* so there is no

longer any reason for you to hate me on account of them] (*Rashi*).

All the Hebrew nouns in this passage are in the singular: *an ox and a donkey ... a servant and a maidservant*. The translation of the terms in plural follows *Rashi* who understands these in the *collective* sense as referring to many. For as the *Midrash* notes, in colloquial Hebrew, people refer to many *oxen* by the singular collective term: *ox*. Similarly, one does not say, ‘The cocks crowed during the night,’ but ‘the cock crowed’.¹¹

וְאֶשְׁלַחָה לְהַגִּיד לַאֲדֹנָי — And I am sending to tell [to] my lord.

[I.e., and I am sending this group of emissaries] to inform you that I am coming to you (*Rashi*).

[See alternate interpretations below.]

לְקַצֹּץ חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ — To gain favor in your eyes.

For I am at peace with you and seek your friendship (*Rashi*).

Rashi’s intent is that the elliptic phrase *I am sending to tell my lord* is unrelated to the above report of Jacob’s wealth. Rather it connects with the later phrase: *To gain favor in your eyes* — the sense being: I am sending to inform my lord that I am coming to gain your favor, and to

1. Verse 15 below specifically indicates that Jacob had *many* oxen and donkeys. That Jacob used the *singular* in describing his wealth is additionally viewed as a matter of etiquette: The righteous always minimize their assets while the wicked always boast about their possessions. Compare Esau’s remark [32:9]: *I have plenty*. This tendency is expressed in *Proverbs* 33:9: *Some pretend to be rich but have nothing; while some pretend to be poor yet possess great wealth* (*Tanchuma*).

At the same time, the extent of the possessions is subtly left undefined through the use of these singular nouns with the force of collectives (*Tzeidah laDerech*).

וישלח לבח המלאכים אל-יעקב לאמר באנו אל-
 אחיך אל-עשו וגם הלך לקראתך
 ונא רב-עמאות איש עמו: ויירא יעקב

do whatever you command (Ramban).

In his advancing his own opinion however, Ramban disagrees, suggesting that the passage reverts to the preceding phrase which describes Jacob's wealth. The sense is: 'I am sending to tell my lord that I own all of these possessions to gain your favor — for you may do with them as you desire.' He thereby intimated that he would send Esau gifts from these possessions. Thus, when Esau later asked [33:8]: 'What do you mean by that whole camp that I met?', Jacob answered: 'To find favor in the eyes of my lord.'

Sforzo, too, interprets that the news of Jacob's aforementioned wealth is the subject of the passage: 'I have acquired oxen and donkeys ... and I am sending to tell my lord [about my wealth] to find favor in your eyes — for I am confident that you will be pleased to hear of my good fortune, and that I would find favor by telling you this.'

For as Be'er Yitzchak notes, the only thing by which Jacob could have hoped to impress the materialistic Esau, was by his wealth.

— Since Jacob proclaimed himself Esau's servant, and it is known that 'whatever property a servant acquires belongs to his master,' Esau would surely be thrilled to learn that his 'servant' has many possessions (Kli Yakar).

Another reason Jacob mentioned his wealth was that he did not want his brother Esau to suspect that

these emissaries were dispatched to him because Jacob was impoverished and really wanted alms. Jacob therefore instructed them to mention his wealth at the outset so Esau would understand that Jacob was independently wealthy and the mission was a sincere one (Kol Yehudah).

7. וַיָּשׁוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים אֶל-יַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר — [And] the angels [see v. 4] returned to Jacob, saying.

We may take it for granted that they carried out their mission, but it was unnecessary for the Torah to relate more details than necessary (Ramban; cf. however, Ramban's own opinion cited below).

The Torah mentions they returned without first informing us that they went. R' Bachya writes that this omission proves that they were angels and in effect accomplished their mission instantaneously. Since in a sense, they returned as soon as they left, there was no need to mention their departure. These myriads of angels were disguised as royal troops, the Midrash records. Some were clad in armor, others were horsemen, others were charioteers. All with one goal: To frighten Esau.

בָּאוּ אֶל אַחִיךָ אֶל עֶשָׂו — We came to your brother, to Esau.

We came to this person whom you regard as a brother, but who behaves toward you as a wicked Esau — he still harbors hatred (Midrash; Rashi).

In addressing Jacob, the emis-

⁷ The angels returned to Jacob saying, 'We came to your brother, to Esau. Moreover, he is heading toward you, and four hundred men are with him.'

⁸ Jacob became very frightened, and it distressed

saries did not refer to Esau as *your lord Esau* for it is disrespectful for a servant to use the expression 'your lord' when addressing his master. Compare the etiquette of the rabbi-student relationship noted in *Rosh Hashanah* 31b: It is not polite for students to say to their teacher, 'your teacher' (*Haamek Davar*).

וְגַם הֵלֵךְ לִקְרֹאתָךְ — Moreover [lit. and also] he is heading [lit. going] toward you.

The actual exchange between the angelic emissaries and Esau is not recorded. *Ramban* [v. 8] conjectures that Esau did not even receive the emissaries *personally*, but ignored them; for had an exchange taken place the Torah would surely have recorded Esau's response concerning his intentions, etc.* Evidently, Esau still bore Jacob a grudge and was waiting for an opportunity to take his revenge, and for this purpose took along his army. It was from their inquiries in the camp that the emissaries learned this. This is the force of וְגַם, *and moreover*, — i.e., *We came to your brother*, and he did not acknowledge us, *and moreover he is heading toward you with might and an army.* This of course only intensified Jacob's misgivings. The text therefore notes

[next verse] that *Jacob became very frightened and it distressed him*. [That Esau's intentions in coming to Jacob were to wage war also follows the opinion of the Sages and is implicit in *Rashi* and most commentators.]

Radak similarly observes that since Esau was coming with a force of four hundred men his intentions were certainly not peaceful. *Sforno* concurs, and draws a parallel from *Numbers* 20:20 וַיֵּצֵא אֶדְוִם לִקְרֹאתוֹ בְּעֵם כָּבֵד [=against] him with a massive force.

וְאַרְבַּע־מֵאוֹת אִישׁ עִמּוֹ — And four hundred men are with him.

Esau brought four hundred men as a smokescreen. Should Jacob be killed or injured, Esau would be able to disassociate himself from his men's action, and disclaim responsibility for the massacre. Compare the czars of today [18th century Russia] who 'innocently' feign ignorance of the spontaneous 'unplanned' pogroms by their populace (*Tiferes Yonasan*).

8. — וַיִּירָא וַיֵּקֶב מְאֹד וַיִּצְרֶה לוֹ — [And] Jacob became very frightened, and it distressed him.

He heard that Esau had sent no message of goodwill, and what is more (וְגַם), was coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men. He knew that Esau's purpose in taking the four hundred men was to wage war against him so he feared greatly for his life (*Ramban*).

In the literal sense, the repetition

*[Thus, *Ramban's* own opinion of what occurred — that Esau did not give the emissaries a proper welcome and possibly did not even allow them to come into his presence — differs from his earlier *general* observation that the emissaries surely fulfilled their mission but the Torah found it pointless to relate the details.]

frightened ... distressed emphasizes the intensity of Jacob's fear (Radak).

Jacob's fear was such that his limbs became soft as wax (*Tanchuma Yashan*).

However, according to *Rashi*, following the *Midrashim*, the double phraseology describes different emotions:

He became very frightened — lest he be slain; *and it distressed him* — that he might be compelled to slay others (*Rashi*). For it was obvious to Jacob that if a battle would ensue, each of them would have to slay or be slain (*Midrash*).

Distress is a stronger emotion than *fear*. The thought that he might be compelled to kill pained Jacob even more than the thought that he himself might be killed (*Rabba*).

Why — following *Rashi's* interpretation — was Jacob distressed at the thought that he might slay the wicked Esau if forced into battle? — Because he might thereby incur the wrath of Isaac who was still fond of Esau (*Tanchuma*; cf. *Mizrachi*).

Furthermore, though it may be argued that Jacob's action in killing Esau — or even his men — would be in self-defense, he was distressed at the circumstances which would cause him to kill. As the Sages note: מַגְלֵלִין חֹזֵקִים, עַל יְדֵי חַיִּיב *Guilt is brought about through an evil [lit. guilty] person*. [If he were thrust into a situation where he had to kill someone, it would tend to prove that he, too, was an evil person; otherwise he would not be put into such a position] (*Divrei David*). [Cf. similar apprehension in *ArtScroll Jonah 4:1*.]

According to the *Midrash* and *Daas Zekeinim*: *He became very frightened* — since he was apprehensive that Esau would be fortified with the merit of having honored his father and mother these past twenty years, while Jacob had not. [Though Jacob had gone with the consent of his parents, he might have overstayed the intended time.] Furthermore, Jacob became very frightened at

the thought that Esau would come fortified with the merit of having dwelt in Eretz Yisrael while he had lived outside the Land.

... *It distressed him*. That is, the very fact that *he became very frightened* of the approaching Esau distressed him since he had received assurances from God [31:3], and such fear would imply a lack of trust. For the pious Jacob felt that in the wake of God's promise, he should have feared no mortal, as Isaiah prophesied (*Isaiah 54:12*): *I (God), I am He that comforts you — who are you that you should be afraid of mortal man ... and have forgotten HASHEM?* That he did experience fear distressed him for he felt that he would be held accountable for his lack of trust, and no miracle would be performed for him. He therefore took to prayer and natural precaution.

Alternatively, news of Esau's impending attack distressed him since Esau had initially said that he would wait till the days of his father's mourning would be at hand before he would avenge himself on Jacob [see 27:41]. Now that Jacob was informed of Esau's approach he was distressed for he interpreted it to mean that the aged Isaac had died. This explains why Jacob mentioned the God of Isaac in his ensuing prayer (v. 10), an appellation he would not have used had he thought his father to be still alive, since [as noted in the *comm.* to 31:42] God does not usually associate His Name with the living (*Daas Zekeinim*).

Mizrachi asks: Since Isaac was still alive, why did Esau seek to harm Jacob when he had disavowed the exercise of such vengeance during his father's lifetime? — He suggests that possibly, Esau's original intention was that he would refrain from violence while in Isaac's proximity; in this case, however they were far away from Isaac.

According to *Haamek Davar*: *it distressed him* — because he interpreted the wave of fear that swept him, to portend that trouble lay ahead. Possibly, Jacob became distressed at this news because he now realized from the turn of events

that he had erred in dispatching conciliatory emissaries to Esau.

According to *Rashbam's* interpretation that the emissaries reported that Esau^a was coming in Jacob's honor and that his intentions were ostensibly peaceful, Jacob was mistrustful that no matter how peaceful Esau *appeared* to be, his intentions were really hostile.

The *Zohar* offers that God instilled this fearful response in Jacob, so that he would be drawn to prayer, since 'God yearns for the prayer of the righteous.' [See comm. to ArtScroll *Song of Songs* p. 111.]

❧ Forfeiture by sin.

Furthermore, as *Rashi* himself explains in v. 11 s.v. קטנתי [based on *Berachos* 4a and *Shabbos* 32a], Jacob's fear in this verse resulted from his apprehension that his sins of the last twenty years might have caused him to forfeit God's promises of protection. Thus, Jacob's fears were not indicative of a lack of trust in God, but rather a lack of confidence in himself, in his own worthiness for a miracle to be wrought on his behalf, and in his own righteous conduct. For, as the *Midrash* observes, there is no assurance for the righteous in this world.^[1]

Alternatively, God's promise in 28:15 assured Jacob of God's protection until

1. Prophetic promises and forfeiture by sin. / A synopsis.

Several fundamental concepts emerge from *Rashi's* Midrashic interpretations here and in v. 11, and the commentators dwell extensively on them.

One may ask why Jacob felt such fear that he might be slain in view of God's earlier promise when he left his father [28:15]: *I am with you; I will guard you wherever you go – And I will return you to this soil; for I will not forsake you until I have done what I have spoken about you.*

– This question is discussed in the *Talmud* [*Berachos* 4a] and as noted in the commentary, the answer offered is that the righteous never take their virtue for granted. Jacob was therefore apprehensive that some sin he committed *after* having received God's promise might have caused him to forfeit that promise. As noted in the *comm.* above [*Midrash* and *Daas Zekeinim*] Jacob was anxious that for the past twenty years he had not honored his father and mother and had not lived in *Eretz Yisrael*, while Esau had both of these merits to fortify him. Compare also the suggestions offered by *Ramban* and *Kli Yakar* respectively that Jacob feared that he might have sinned by entering into a covenant with Laban and by flattering Esau. Abraham felt similar fears, and needed constant assurance that he had not become unworthy of God's blessings. See footnote, p. 507, and cf. *Rashi* and *Ramban* to verse 11 s.v. קטנתי and *Shabbos* 32a cited there.

Similarly, the *Midrash* remarks in its exposition on 28:20 [see *comm.* there]: Notwithstanding God's promise (28:15): *I am with you*, Jacob said [*ibid.* v. 20], *If God will be with me.*

– From here we learn that there is no guarantee for the righteous man in this World.

Consequently, Jacob knew that a Divine promise was not an inviolable decree that Hashem must honor irrespective of circumstances; it was liable to be cancelled should his deeds and conduct demand it.

What then of the seemingly contradictory dictum [*Berachos* 7a]: 'No word of blessing that issued from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, even if conditional, was ever withdrawn by Him?'

Rambam (*Yesodei HaTorah* 10:4, and preface to *Peirush HaMishnayos*) deals with this question at length. He explains that sin *may* cause God to withhold even a promise for good, but only when the promise was to remain a private communication between God and the prophet. If, however, it was communicated to the prophet for transmission to others as a good tiding, God would not withdraw it 'because otherwise there would be no way to establish the validity of prophecy [for if promises were always subject to change, a prophet's inaccuracy could never be held against him and he could never be established as a true prophet]. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave us as a principle of His Torah [see *Deut.* 18:21-22] that the prophet can be tested by the realization of his assurances.' This is evident from Jeremiah's dialogue with Hananiah, son of Azur, when the former prophesied evil while the latter prophesied good. Jeremiah said to Hananiah: If my words [prophesying evil] are not con-

he reached the borders of Eretz Yisrael – which he had already done; the promise did not guarantee his safety until he reached his father's house (*Sifsei Chachomim*).

Additionally, there was no promise that this protection would extend to his children. Perhaps Esau would kill Jacob's young children, and God's promises regarding Jacob's descendants [28:15] would apply to other children who would be born after Jacob returned to Eretz Yisrael (*Ibn Ezra*; *Binnah leltim*). [*Ramban* rejects this, maintaining that the promise would necessarily extend to his children; rather Jacob's apprehension was that he might have forfeited God's promise by sinfulness.]

What 'sin' could have made Jacob apprehensive?

Daas Zekeinim, cited above, mentions that for twenty years Jacob had not honored his parents, nor lived in the Holy Land.

However, all of these references to Jacob's apprehension over the possible loss of God's protection recall His promise of *twenty years earlier* when Jacob left Beersheba (28:15). But they do not explain the fact that *only a few days ago* God had reiterated [in 31:3] the essence of His promise to 'be' with Jacob! What grave sin could Jacob have committed in *these few days* to forfeit the renewed promise of God's protection?

firmed by events, that will not prove that I am a false prophet. But should your predictions [prophesying good] not be fulfilled, you will be proved a false prophet: as it is said: *Nevertheless listen to this word that I speak, ... the prophet that prophesied of peace [i.e. good fortune] when the word of the prophet shall come true, then shall the prophet be known that HASHEM really sent him.* [See *Jeremiah* 28:7-9.]

Therefore, the failure of such a prophecy to be realized proves that the prophet is a false one. But when he predicts calamity, the non-fulfillment of his forecast does not discredit him, since God in His mercy is reluctant; or it may be that the sinners repented and were forgiven, as happened to the people of Nineveh. Or possibly the sentence was merely deferred, as in the case of Hezekiah.

This is akin to Jacob's case. God's word to Jacob had come as a personal promise – and no prophet's veracity was at stake. Hence Jacob's apprehension that as a result of some sin he might have forfeited that assurance.

There is, however, an exception to this rule that a private communication is contingent upon the possibility that sin may cause it to be nullified: When God promises a good thing, and guarantees it with a שבועה, נשבע, ברית, covenant, then there is no longer a doubt as to the outcome. [See *Ramban* to 15:7; also *Ohel David* II to *Psalms* 89:35].

Akeidas Yitzchak (gate 96) takes issue with *Ramban's* thesis that prophetic predictions for the good must unequivocally be fulfilled because of a passage in *Jeremiah* 18:9 (also see *Ramban* to 15:7; *Ralbag* and *Ibn Chasda'i*, cited by *Akeidas Yitzchak*). ... And at another time I speak concerning a nation ... to build and to plant ... but if it does evil in My sight, and does not obey My voice, then I repent of the good with which I said I would benefit them. [Hence the implication that God could withdraw a promise for the good. *Ramban*, however, would interpret this verse that such withdrawal of a promise for good would not conflict with the general rule, because it had been a private communication to the prophet (see *Mizrachi*; and *Maharsha*, *Berachos* 4a).]

There is a seemingly blatant exception to *Ramban's* rule that prophecy for the good is never withdrawn. The *Talmud* (*Shabbos* 55a) tells us: Never has a favorable word gone forth from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, which He revoked, except during the destruction of the First Temple, when He promised the righteous that they would not perish with the wicked [see *Ezekiel* 9:4ff], but He changed His plan. For, as the *Talmud* there explains, the righteous during the First Temple period suffered for their failure to rebuke the wicked. [Thus, the implication is that sin could cause forfeiture of God's promise.]

According to most editions to *Ramban*, *Yesodei HaTorah* 10:4, he himself takes note of this passage, and cites it as the sole exception to the rule. Others claim, however, [see *Avodas HaMelech*, *Krakovsky*, *ibid.*] that this is actually a contradiction that a copyist noted on the margin which was mistakenly incorporated in the text. (For a full treatment of this problem – see *Mizrachi*; *Lechem Mishnah*, *ibid.*; *Gevuros Hashem*, ch. 7. See also *Ohel David* II to *I Chronicles* 22:9, 23:17; *Ezekiel* 9:4; and *Jonah* 3:4).

[Noteworthy in this context is the opinion of *R' Nissim* on 15:2 that God does not withdraw

וּשְׁלַח לְבִטִּי
מֵאֵד וּיְצַר לוֹ וַיַּחֲץ אֶת־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ
וְאֶת־הַצָּאן וְאֶת־הַבְּקָר וְהַגְּמָלִים לְשֵׁנִי
ט מַחֲנֹת: וַיֹּאמֶר אִם־יָבוֹא עָשׂוּ אֶל־
הַמַּחֲנֶה הָאֶחָד וְהִכּוּ וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה
י הַנִּשְׁאָר לִפְלִיטָה: וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֱלֹהֵי

Abarbanel therefore interprets that the above questions are academic since Jacob's fear did not result from lack of faith; his trust in God was genuine and strong. Rather, Jacob was like a hero who recognizes his emotions and is prepared for a brave death. A soldier who considers himself immortal is not a hero, but a fool; just as one who dispenses charity to demonstrate a scorn for money is not a philanthropist, but a spendthrift. One should dread death, but be ready to face it for a sufficient cause. It was thus with Jacob. Were he to think Esau would treat him as a loving brother, his readiness to confront Esau would not have indicated trust in God. To the contrary, because he was fully aware of Esau's murderous hatred, and because he feared death, his greatness becomes apparent. Despite the danger, his trust in God overcame his fear and he made ready to meet Esau. Such a person can be called a believer in God's prophecy.

Jacob did not despair nor did he rely on a miracle. Rather, he took all possible steps to protect himself and those with him. The Torah elaborates on his behavior to teach us how one should act in the face of danger.

§Military preparations.

וַיַּחֲץ אֶת הָעָם ... לְשֵׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת — So [lit. and] he divided the people ... into two camps.

Jacob divided the camp in such a manner that each camp had some of his men, maidservants, and cattle. He did not separate his wives and children however; they remained together in the same camp. Jacob's strategy was that he would station the camp which did not contain his wives and children at the forefront — in the direction from which Esau and his men were most likely to approach: They would serve, in effect, as a buffer between Jacob's family and Esau (*Abarbanel*).

Or *HaChaim* emphasizes that Jacob's every action was inspired by a desire to minimize reliance on a miracle. [See *Shabbos* 32a cited in v. 11 s.v. קִטְנִית.]

R' Chiya the Elder said: We learn from Jacob's action in dividing his property that one should not keep all one's wealth in a single place (*Midrash*).

Cf. the prudent advice given in *Bava*

tzaddik being free from sin. However, if the information is transmitted as a prediction, it is unqualified.

According to *Ramban* (*Genesis* 12:6; see *R' Chavel*) it would seem that there is a distinction between a prophecy where an act was done by the prophet to 'fortify', or 'act out' part of the prophecy.

Some qualify the words of *Ramban* (*Ran*, *Derashos* 2) that this applies only where the prophecy contains bad tidings, while others disagree (see *Ohel David* to *II Chronicles* 22:9 for an explanation of *Ramban*).

[Admittedly, the above treatment is an oversimplification of a fundamental philosophic doctrine. Readers are urged to consult the original Hebrew sources whenever possible. See also the *Overview* to this *Sidrah* where the *hashkafah* implications are discussed.]

him. So he divided the people with him, and the flocks, herds, and camels, into two camps. ⁹ For he said, 'If Esau comes to the one camp and strikes it down, - then the remaining camp shall survive.'

Metzia 42a: One should always divide one's wealth into three parts: investing a third in land, a third in merchandise, and keeping a third available for use.

[*Tanchuma* offers that the term *יָחַד*, *divided*, connotes that each person was, in a sense, divided in two]:

What did Jacob do? — He armored them underneath, and clothed them in white without. [Thus, they were outwardly dressed for a friendly meeting, but were prepared for battle should it prove necessary.]

R' Hirsch notes the striking contrast between Jacob's confidence throughout his twenty-year ordeal with Laban, and his fear of confrontation with Esau. He comments that Jacob's despondency was caused by the knowledge that, no matter how innocent and righteous his behavior, Esau had felt personally injured by him.

§ Preparation for Battle.

אם יבוא עשו אל המחנה האחת — If Esau comes to the one camp and strikes it down.

The phrase *המחנה האחת*, *the one camp*, is in the feminine gender, while *והכהו*, *smite it* [lit. *smite him*] is in the masculine. *Rashi* explains that the word *מַחֲנֶה*, *camp*, can be either masculine or feminine, as evidenced from *Psalms* 28:3 where the feminine gender is used, and below, 33:8, where the masculine gender occurs. Other nouns which occur in Scripture in both the male and female gender are *שֶׁמֶשׁ*, *sun*;

רוּחַ, *wind, spirit*; *אֵשׁ*, *fire*.

Whenever dual-gendered words appear, the masculine form is used to indicate its essential nature while the feminine is used with regard to non-essential characteristics. In the case of an aggressive attack on a camp, the result can be damage and casualties — indicated by the feminine form — or total annihilation — indicated by the masculine form. Therefore, both forms are used in our verse (*Gur Aryeh*).

וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה הַנִּשְׁאָר לְפָלִיטָה — Then the remaining camp shall survive [lit. *shall be for survivors*].

— It will survive despite his attack, *because I will fight him*. Accordingly, Jacob prepared himself for three things *לְרוּרוֹן*, *for a gift* [i.e., *appeasement*] — see verses 13-22; *לְחַפְזָה*, *for prayer* — see v. 10; *לְמִלְחָמָה*, *for battle* — as in our passage [for *I will fight him*] (*Tanchuma*) [*Rashi*].

Unlike the appeasement and prayer which are literally derived from the verses cited, the third preparation: *battle*, is not stated explicitly in our verse which merely mentions *surviving*. Rather, there was a tradition among the Sages that there were the three preparations listed by *Rashi* above, and that of *battle* is attached to our verse. Based on this tradition, *Rashi* adds the comment that the other camp would survive despite his attack *because I will fight him* (*Mizrachi*).

Sforno suggests that as a natural result of Esau's preoccupation with the first camp, the second will have time to flee.

Ramban offers that in the *literal* sense of the verse, Jacob is not threatening battle, but is expressing the hope that one camp would be

וּשְׁלַח לְבִיא
אָבִי אַבְרָהָם וְאֵלֹהֵי אָבִי יִצְחָק יְהוָה
הָאֹמֵר אֵלַי שׁוּב לְאֶרֶצְךָ וּלְמוֹלַדְתְּךָ
יָא וְאִיטִיבָה עִמָּךְ: קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים

able to escape while the other is engaged in battle; or that Esau's anger will subside after battling the first camp; or that deliverance will come to them from God in the interim. [Cf. *Rashbam*: The camps were a distance apart, and should danger develop, the other camp would see it and flee.]

However, *Ramban* concludes, the correct interpretation, expressed by *Rashi*, citing the *Midrash*, is that Jacob prepared himself also for war. Jacob was confident that all his posterity could not be destroyed by Esau, and even if one camp fell, the other would certainly escape. This portends the destiny of the Jewish people: Though decrees designed to exterminate the Jewish people will be promulgated in certain countries, Israel will never be exterminated entirely. Should one gentile king decree their destruction, another king will be merciful in his country, and offer them refuge.⁽¹⁾

🕌Prayer

[Human precautions alone are insufficient; Jacob invokes God's aid in prayer.]

10. אֵלֹהֵי אָבִי אַבְרָהָם וְאֵלֹהֵי אָבִי
... יִצְחָק ה' הָאֹמֵר אֵלַי — *God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac; HASHEM Who said to me ...*

There are two difficulties here:
(a) Why does Jacob now use the expression *God of Isaac*, while in

31:42 he avoided this appellation, substituting in its stead יִצְחָק *the Dread of Isaac*; (b) Why the repetition 'HASHEM Who said to me'? The passage should have read, *God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, Who said to me ...*

The answer to the first difficulty is that Jacob was not himself designating God by the title *God of Isaac*, but alluding to the promise in 28:13 where God referred to Himself as *God of Isaac*. The explanation of the passage, which at the same time resolves the second difficulty, is: Jacob said to the Holy One, Blessed Be He: 'You made me two promises: first, You promised me Your protection when I left Beer Sheba and you appeared to me as *HASHEM, God of Abraham and God of Isaac*; and second, when I left Laban's house You appeared to me as *HASHEM* and said [31:3]: *Return to the land of your father's and to your relatives and I will be with you*. Now, I appeal for the fulfillment of these two promises [and accordingly invoke You with the Names You used in making them: *God of Abraham and God of Isaac and HASHEM*] (*Rashi*)

[See *Daas Zekeinim* to v. 8 s.v. וַיִּקְרָא], according to which Esau's aggressive advance against him caused Jacob to think that Isaac was dead, for otherwise, he surmised, Esau would not have come to attack him. This would explain why

1. As *R' Hirsch* writes: Never has Esau's sword reached us all in one swoop. When we bled on the Rhine, our brethren in the Slavic lands were safe, and vice versa. "God acted righteously to Israel by scattering them among the nations" (*Pesachim* 87b). Jacob, during his personal exile, now did the same.

32 10 Then Jacob said, 'God of my father Abraham and
10-11 God of my father Isaac; HASHEM Who said to me,
"Return to your land and to your relatives and I will
do good with you" — 11 I have been diminished by all

he used the appellation *God of Isaac*, a title used only of the dead.]

Midrash HaGadol observes that our verse illustrates how the sons of the righteous take pride in their parents. Jacob did not base his petition on his own worth, but on the merit of his forefathers Abraham and Isaac.

Sforno notes the similarity between Jacob's introductory words and the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*. Both appeal to Hashem as the God of the Patriarchs.

ה' האמר אלי שוב לארצך ולמולדתך
וְאֵיטִיבָה עִמָּךְ — HASHEM, Who said
to me, 'Return to the land of your
fathers and to your relatives and I
will do good [or: deal bountifully]
with you.'

[Jacob thus recalls in a paraphrase of 31:3 that it was God Who had bidden him to return to his native land and promised His protection. As *Ramban* notes, *I will do*

good with you, referred to the promise in 31:3: *I will be with you*, for as *Radak* explains, it is God's intent that Jacob cites here, not His actual words. (See v. 13 אָמַרְתָּ וְאֵתָהּ). The flow of the prayer, according to *Rashi*, is that Jacob invokes these promises, but he is afraid that he might have forfeited them due to insufficient merit or sinfulness (v. 11). Nevertheless in conclusion (v. 12), he implores God's graciousness to save him from Esau in any case.]

11. קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים — *I have been diminished by [lit. from] all the kindnesses.*⁽¹⁾

The translation *I have been diminished* follows *Rashi*: My merits have been diminished in the consequence of all the kindnesses, which You have already shown me. Therefore I am afraid; perhaps since the

1. The *Talmud* teaches that a Torah scholar should have a *שְׁמִינִית שְׁבַעֲמִינִית זָאֵה*, an eighth of an eighth [one sixty-fourth measure] of pride (*Sotah* 5a). The *Vilna Gaon* comments that this lesson is derived from our verse. Though he feared that he was unworthy of further miracles, Jacob did acknowledge that he had had a prior stock of merit which had earned him God's earlier graciousness. However, a more appropriate show of humility would have been for Jacob to attribute even those earlier favors to the merit of Abraham and Isaac, rather to his own.

This teaches a lesson in humility: one should pray for future mercy based on the merit of his fathers (v. 10), but he should attribute past goodness to his own meager spiritual merits — which may have become depleted. That Jacob felt justified in taking credit for past mercies proves that although a Torah scholar should be very humble, it should not be to the point of total self-abnegation.

This concept is alluded to by the rather strange expression that a scholar should have an 'eighth of an eighth of pride.' Our *sidrah*, *Vayishlach*, is the eighth in the Torah, and our verse, קִטְנִיתִי, *I have become small* is the eighth verse of the *sidrah*. Thus, this form of permissible pride is indicated by this verse (*Vilna Gaon*).

Maharsha (*Sotah* 5a) explains that a scholar must display a certain measure of pride in honor of the Torah; not to do so would seem to denigrate his learning. He also cites a witty comment on this topic. In that passage, the *Talmud* condemns גִּס רִיחַ, a person of coarse and arrogant nature. The word גִּס has the numerical value of sixty-three; thus a scholar who exceeds the permissible extent of pride — 1/64 — puts himself into the category of coarse-natured people.

ומכל-האמת אשר עשית את-עבדך כי
במקלי עבדתי את-הירדן הזה ועתה

וושלח
לבו

promises were made I have become soiled by sin, and this may cause me to be delivered into Esau's hands.

[The broad aspects of the underlying *hashkafah*/philosophic ramifications of this fundamental concept of *הגרום החטא*, *forfeiture by sin*, have been discussed in the *comm.* and *footnote* to v. 8.][¹]

[Thus *Rashi* renders the *א* of *מכל* not as the comparative *than*, but as meaning *מפני*, *in consequence of*: I have become unworthy — i.e. I now have less to my credit — in consequence of all the kindnesses, etc.]

Cf. *Onkelos*: 'My merits are less from all the kindnesses, etc.'

Rashi resorts to both interpretations: 'my merits have been diminished' and 'perhaps ... I have become soiled by sin,' for had Jacob not been apprehensive that he had sinned, certainly that righteous man's merits could not have been so diminished that he would have to fear defeat and death at Esau's hands (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*).

Although [as evident from his commentary to v. 13 and to 28:20] *Ramban* agrees that Jacob's underlying fear was due to his apprehension that he might have sinned, he disagrees with *Rashi's* interpretation that this fear was expressed in the contextual flow of this petition. For, *Ramban* reasons, if Jacob was expressing apprehension that his merits were significantly reduced by God's many favors and, additionally, that he might have forfeited them by sin, what value would there have been in invoking God's promise: *I will surely do good with*

you, and I will make your offspring like the sand of the sea [v. 13]? It would be contrary to the flow of his petition — perhaps he forfeited that promise as well! [*Divrei David* to v. 12 answers, in defense of *Rashi*, that it was not Jacob's own merit that he was invoking there but the merit of his *forefathers*; such merit he could not forfeit].

Furthermore, *Ramban* reasons, according to *Rashi's* interpretation — what significant showering of kindnesses had Jacob received following God's promise given him only a few weeks earlier in Charan?

— *Ramban* concludes [in consonance with one view in the *Midrash*] that the phrase *מכל קטנתי* does not mean *I have been diminished in consequence of all...* Rather, Jacob was saying in absolute terms, *I am unworthy* [lit. *too small*] of all the kindnesses ... *You have done for me*. Thus, Jacob was declaring not that his merits had been depleted, but that he was *never* worthy of so many kindnesses.

The *חסדים*, *kindnesses*, are those which God did for him without having first promised them, while *אמת*, *truth*, refers to the kindnesses performed in fulfillment of earlier promises. [For alternate interpretations of these terms, see below.] Thus, the tenor of Jacob's remark was: I am unworthy both of the kindnesses You did for me in fulfillment of promises, and of the many

1. Compare *Shabbos* 32a: R' Yannai said: A man should never stand in a place of danger and say that a miracle will be performed for him, for perhaps it might not be. And if a miracle is performed for him, it is deducted from his merits. [Since the miracle is a reward for some of his merits, he now has less to his credit]. R' Chanin derives this teaching from our verse. [And as the general tenor of the *gemara* there illustrates, when danger is near and one has need of a miracle, his sins are recalled and a determination is made if he is worthy of a miracle.]

32 the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have 11 done Your servant. For with my staff I crossed this

..

kindnesses You did without having promised them earlier.

Rashbam interprets like *Ramban*, and adds: You were far more gracious to me than I deserved, for I have not yet fulfilled the vow I made to You twenty years ago. Despite Your promises to me, I know that You judge man according to his deeds — and in these I am deficient.

ומכלי האמת — *And by all the truth.*

[Lit. and] I have been diminished... from all the truth — the truth of Your words, for You have already fulfilled all the promises You made to me (*Rashi*).

Rashi is drawn to this interpretation since truth and falsehood by definition are possible only in connection with the veracity of statements and the fulfillment of spoken commitments (*Mizrachi*).

[The connotations of the terms חסד and אמת, kindness and truth have been explained in the comm. to 24:27 and 24:49. Essentially as noted above, kindness is the goodness conferred voluntarily, while truth is the fulfillment of an obligation.]

Unlike 24:49 and below 47:29 where *Onkelos* renders the phrase חסד ואמת as kindness and truth, in our verse *Onkelos* renders the phrase kindness and all the good. The latter, as *Ramban* explains, refers to the enduring goodness which resulted from the promises which become realized [= נתאמת] in Jacob, as reflected by his children, by his wealth and by his honor. For, as *Ramban* suggests, the word אמת, truth, derives from אמן, trust, and refers to assured existence, as opposed to something which is

fleeting, temporary, and ultimately disappointing. It is analogous to II Samuel 7:16: Your house and your kingdom shall be confirmed [=existent] forever.

Haamek Davar similarly explains אמת as referring to God's promise that from him there would descend the Chosen Nation which would exist eternally.

... I was also unworthy of the אמת, the favors you bestowed upon me for the sake of my forefathers. Just as You have acted beyond the strict requirements of Your promises until now, I beg that You continue to do so, and save me (*Sforno*).

Jacob proceeds to elaborate on the kindnesses God bestowed upon him (*Haamek Davar*):

כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה — *For with my staff I crossed this Jordan.*

— That is, only with my staff. I possessed nothing but my staff — neither silver, gold, nor cattle. The *Midrash* explains: When Jacob had reached the river Jordan, he had placed his staff in the Jordan, and the Jordan split for him [allowing him to pass over it (*Rashi*)].¹

According to *Yelamdenu* cited in *Yalkut*, this miracle occurred when Jacob had been enroute to Charan years earlier, while according to the version in *Tanchuma Yashan*, it had just now occurred.

Rashi offers both the literal and *Midrashic* interpretations because both are necessary for a proper understanding of the passage. Jacob's former poverty is implicit from the contrast drawn in the subsequent phrase: And now I have become two camps, while the inclusion of the otherwise superfluous phrase this Jordan demands the *Midrashic*

1. In keeping with the concept that every incident recorded regarding the Patriarchs was a prophetic prognostication of what would befall their descendants, the *Midrashim* observe how the Jordan was destined to divide before Jacob's descendants in the time of Joshua, when they entered the Promised Land; see *Joshua* 3 and 4.

Furthermore, Jacob's staff was the staff later carried by Judah, Moses, Aaron, David, and every king until the destruction of the Temple. It is the staff which will be carried by the Messiah, at the time of the Redemption (*Yalkut* 1:763).

וישלה יב הייתי לשני מקנות: הצילני נא מיד אחי
לב/יב-יד מיד עשו כי-ירא אנכי אתו פן-יבוא
ג והכני אם על-בנים: ואתה אמרת היטב
איטיב עמר ושמת את-זרעך כחול הים
ד שני יד אשר לא-יספר מרב: ויילן שם בלילה

interpretation (Gur Aryeh; Tzeidah laDe-rech).

[On Jacob's poverty when he left his father's house, see 'Jacob's Possessions' in *comm.* to end of 28:10.]

Onkelos perceives with my staff to figuratively mean: I alone.

The use of the word הנה, this [Jordan], would imply that when Jacob uttered this prayer he was located in the general area of the Jordan (Hoffman).

Even according to those who maintain that he was not near the Jordan, the phrase can be transposed to mean 'for with this my staff, I crossed the Jordan.' Nevertheless, even in the familiar sense it is not unusual for Scripture to employ the word זה, this, even when not in the presence of the subject, e.g. Exodus 32:1 אשר זה משה האיש, for this man Moses (Tur).

And now I have become [to] two camps. — ועתה הייתי לשני מקנות

— So wonderfully had God blessed me! [See 28:15; 31:5, 7, 9, 42] (Ralbag).

From Jacob's remark we learn that a person must recall his travail during times of tranquility in order that he may appreciate his advantages and thank God for them (R' Bachya).

12. הצילני נא מיד אחי מיד עשו — Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau.

1. After having recited God's praise in having showered him with undeserved bounties, Jacob proceeds to pray for his requirements. Jacob's petition is exemplary because he stated it in precise unambiguous terms: He said, *Rescue me, please*. Since this might be interpreted to mean from Laban from whom he was already rescued, he added from the hand of my brother. Since brother might mean kinsman in general, he added from the hand of Esau. Moreover, lest it be argued that he had no need of such delivery, he continued for I fear him lest he come and strike me down, mother and children (Zohar).

Shloh HaKadosh writes in a similar vein: Though the Holy One, Blessed be He, discerns hearts and perceives man's intention, nevertheless one must be very specific when praying. It appears to me that the reason is that the words of prayer are composed of the holy letters, so they rise up and split open the very heavens.

[The contextual flow is either: 'I implore you to rescue me even though my merits have been diminished in consequence of the kindnesses You did on my behalf;' or: 'Though I was never worthy of all the kindnesses You did on my behalf.' Or, the sense is: 'You have been so gracious to me in bestowing Your bountiful blessings; of what use will it all be if Esau prevails and strikes me down? Therefore: Rescue me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau']...

— From the hand of my brother who does not treat me as a brother, but as a wicked Esau (Rashi).¹¹

— From the hand of my brother, who may have some claim against me as a brother who feels I have wronged him; and save me from the hand of Esau, who, in accordance with his violent nature may seek a revenge beyond what I deserve (R' Hirsch).

— פן יבוא והכני אם על-בנים — Lest he come and strike me down, mother and [following Sforno; lit. upon] children.

The idiomatic phrase which

32 *Jordan and now I have become two camps.* ¹² *Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him lest he come and strike me down, mother and children.* ¹³ *And You had said, "I will surely do good with you and I will make your offspring like the sand of the sea which is too numerous to count."*

figuratively conjures up an image of wholesale, merciless slaughter, is explained by *Ibn Ezra* and others as elliptic: ... 'And will strike me down, and also strike down mother and child.'

— Even if I manage to escape, he will be striking at me by striking down mother and child, [because my family will be harmed]. The Hebrew expression *mother upon child* means mother and child; cf. *Hoshea* 10:14 (*Sforno*).

Jacob's primary fear was that Esau might come and strike down mother and child. As for himself, God's promise of protection came to him when he crossed the Jordan alone, with only his staff. He was not certain that this promise would extend even to those in his party — i.e., mother and child (*Daas Zekeinim*). [Cf. *Ramban* to v. 9 s.v. וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה.]

13. וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ הֵטֵב אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ — *And You had said, 'I will surely do good [or: deal bountifully; lit. 'good, I will do good'] with you.*

[See v. 10; a reference to the promise in 31:3.] Though God did not say these exact words, Jacob refers to God's intent as expressed in 31:3 (*Haamek Davar*; cf. *comm.* to end of 24:51).

Rashi, following the *Midrash* comments: The compound form has a dual connotation: הֵטֵב, *goodness*—in your own merit; אֵיטִיב,

I will do good—in the merit of your forefathers [since in fact, it was not his own 'diminished' merit, but the undiminished זכות אבות, *merit of his forefathers*, that Jacob was invoking (*Divrei David*; this answers *Ramban's* objection in v. 11 s.v. וְקָטַנְתִּי)].

Though the compound form may be interpreted as being merely emphatic, *Rashi* cites this interpretation as reflecting the simple sense of the passage since in fact both of God's promises carried distinct connotations and 'wherever it is possible to expound, we expound' (*Gur Aryeh*; *Mizrachi*). [Comp. *Mizrachi* to 12:1 לְרִלֶּךָ.]

The continuity of Jacob's prayer is, as noted, variously perceived:

— You have done many *unpromised* kindnesses for me notwithstanding my unworthiness. Surely, You will not withhold from those kindnesses which You did, in Your abundant mercy, *promise me* — namely that You would bestow good upon me and increase my offspring (*Ramban*).

Rashbam: 'Though You are not bound to keep Your promise because I am unworthy of it, nevertheless rescue me for the sake of Your Name which You make glorious when You keep Your word.' Moses prayed similarly when God wanted to annihilate Israel [*Exodus* 32:12]: *Let not the Egyptian say, 'It was with evil intent that He delivered them ...'* And subsequently [*ibid.* v. 14]: *HASHEM* relented regarding the punishment.

וְשִׁמְתִי אֶת וְרֵעֶךָ כְּחֹל הַיָּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִסְפֵּר מֵרֵב — *And I will make [lit. place] your offspring like the sand*

וישלח והוא ויקח מן הבא בידו מנחה לעשו
 לבטורטו טו אחיו: ענים מאתים ותישים עשרים
 טז רחלים מאתים ואילים עשרים: גמלים

of the sea which is too numerous to count [lit. which is not counted from abundance.]

Actually God did not promise him this explicitly, but said [28:14]: 'Your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth.' Rather, Jacob was referring to God's promise [*ibid.* v. 15] 'I will not forsake you until I have done that which I have spoken [to Abraham] concerning you,' — specifically, the promise concerning Jacob, God had made to Abraham [22:17]: *I will greatly increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens and like the sand on the seashore* (Rashi).

Why then did Jacob not invoke the blessing ... as the dust of the earth which God had given him directly? — Perhaps the blessing given his forefathers was more efficacious, since ancestral merit is not prone to be forfeited by sin. One's own merit can be negated by sin, but God 'recalls the kindnesses of our forefather's' on behalf of the children even when the children are not worthy (*Gur Aryeh*).

✽A tribute is prepared.

Jacob set a pattern for future generations who would be confronted by oppression from Esau's descendants. He sought salvation both by means of *דורון*, an attempt to appease the enemy with gifts, and *תפלה*, prayer for God's help (R' Hirsch).

14. וילן שם בלילה ההוא — [And] he spent that night there.

He had hoped for a prophetic dream in response to his prayer. Seeing that he received no such Divine communication, he pro-

ceeded to prepare a tribute to send to Esau (*Abarbanel; Alshich; Malbim*).

That God did not, in fact, send an angelic emissary to Jacob until Jacob dispatched the gift to Esau, teaches us an important lesson: Even a righteous person should not rely on miracles, but maintain vigilance and prepare — to his utmost ability — for any eventuality, with prayer, appeasement, and ultimately, battle. Above all, one's heart should be turned toward God with full trust, and He shall do (*Radak*).

According to the Midrashim [see *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* §36], Jacob spent that night soul-searching to uncover the transgression that caused this ordeal to be imposed upon him. He concluded that he must fulfill his earlier vow to separate tithes from that which God had given him [28:22], so first he separated the tithe and then assembled a tribute to Esau from the remaining non-sanctified portion [see *Rashi, below*].

וַיִּקַּח מִן הַבָּא בְּיָדוֹ — Then he took from that what had come in his hand.

I.e., from that which was in his possession. Compare the use of this term in *Numbers* 21:26: וַיִּקַּח מִן הַבָּא בְּיָדוֹ ... , and he took ... out of his possession. Midrashically, 'in his hand' signifies precious stones and jewels which one usually ties in a package and carries in his hand [to guard against loss]. Alternatively, the term refers to those items which

14-16 ¹⁴ He spent that night there, then he took, from what had come in his hand, a tribute to Esau his brother: ¹⁵ Two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats; two hundred ewes and twenty rams; ¹⁶ thirty

a man may keep in his own possession, namely: חולין, *unconsecrated portion* [cattle and produce from which the tithe had already been set aside; until this is done the owner's use of them is limited]. Thus, Jacob had first set aside the tithe as he had vowed to [28:22], and only afterwards did he prepare a tribute for Esau [from the חולין, *unconsecrated portion*, which legitimately בָּרָא, *came into his own possession* having been duly tithed] (Rashi).

According to Ramban, the expression means: *from that which he had with him*. The Torah is telling us that Jacob composed his gift from those possessions which constituted his wealth, namely his flocks [as enumerated in the following verses]. He was en route and had no opportunity to buy silver, gold and garments.

[The idiomatic sense of the term according to Ramban would be that Jacob selected the gifts from that which was 'within hand's reach,' i.e., readily available to him — from his livestock.]

— In an effort to send only the choicest animals, Jacob selected only those which he kept בָּרָא, in his own charge, and not from those inferior ones which he entrusted בָּרָא, in his servant's care. Furthermore, he did not send any wheat or fine fruits since those are items which result from the dew of the heavens and the fatness of the earth, and Jacob wished to avoid any suggestion that he had benefit-

ted in a material sense from Isaac's blessing, thus reopening the wound [see Rashi to v. 5]. The most effective gift would be something that came into Jacob's hand from his own toil and labor. That was the livestock he now selected (*Alshich*).

Baal HaTurim notes that the numerical value of מִנְחָה, *tribute; present* [=103], equals that of אֲבָנִים, [precious stones (see Rashi above)].

מִנְחָה לְעֵשָׂו אָחִיו — A tribute [or: present] to Esau his brother.

That the Torah, which usually economizes on every letter, enumerates in the following verses, the details of the gift, implies approval of this method of appeasing Esau (Radak).

The word מִנְחָה, *gift, offering*, is generally understood by the commentators to denote a present intended to secure the goodwill of a superior. Cf. II Kings 8:9.

15. עֵשָׂו מָאֲחִים וְחֲשִׁים עֶשְׂרִים — Two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats ...

Two hundred she-goats need twenty he-goats for breeding. Similarly in the case of the other animals Jacob [who as a skilled shepherd was fully familiar with animals' breeding habits (*Ibn Ezra*)] sent sufficient males for the needs of the females (Rashi).

Rashi continues: In the *Midrash* an inference is drawn from here regarding the frequency of conjugal duty required by the Torah [see *Mishnah Kesubos* 5:6]: men of leisure, daily; working men, twice weekly; donkey-drivers, once weekly; camel-drivers, once in thirty days; sailors, once in six months, 'but I do not know exactly how to

וישלח לבזיח
 מיניקות ובניהם שלשים פרות ארבעים
 ופרים עשרה אתנת עשרים ועיקם
 עשרה: ויתן ביד-עבדיו עדר עדר לבדו
 ויאמר אל-עבדיו עברו לפני ורוח
 תשימו בין עדר ובין עדר: ויצו את-
 הראשון לאמר כי יפגשך עשו אחי

relate this Midrashic inference [i.e., how the *Midrash* derives these schedules of obligation from Jacob's tribute]. However, it appears to me that we derive from here that the frequency of conjugal duty is not the same for every man, but according to the burden imposed upon him by his occupation [with the frequency decreasing with the amount of physical strain and/or the amount of time his occupation takes away from him]. Thus, he-goats and rams were given ten females each. Since they are free from labor, each can impregnate ten females, and once a female becomes pregnant, it does not receive the male [thus the male is forced to copulate with another female (*Mizrachi*)]. For the oxen that are engaged in labor, he gave but four females for each male; for the donkeys that travel long distances: two females for each male; and for camels that travel even longer distances, one female for each male.'

— The implication is drawn from the fact that the Torah would not list such details did they not contain a moral or *halachic* teaching. Furthermore, we must assume that these numbers were certainly not haphazard, but reflected Jacob's skill as a breeder who intended to provide as acceptable a gift as possible (*Mizrachi*; *Tzeidah laDerech*; *Maharsha*).

16. גמלים מיניקות ובניהם שלשים —
Thirty nursing camels with [lit. and] *their colts.*

In the *litera*! meaning of the phrase, the nursing camels were sent with their colts [and no male adult camels were included in the gift]. According to the *Midrash*, however, the word בניהם is interpreted not as *their colts*, but as בניהם, *their builders*, meaning the males who figuratively 'build' the

family by impregnating the females. Why are they referred to by allusion as 'builders' rather than directly as male camels? — Because camels are unique in that they cohabit modestly, unlike other animals which do so in the open. In recognition of this moral type of behavior, the Torah does not name them directly (*Rashi* according to *Mizrachi*).

Gur Aryeh explains that the *Midrash* was compelled to offer the alternative interpretation that Jacob sent males rather than colts, so that the set of camels should parallel those of the other animals. Since Jacob sent males and females of all the other animals, we must assume that he did the same with the camels.

The total number of camels is not clear from the verse. The supercommentators to *Rashi* all agree that according to the literal interpretation, there were thirty nursing camels and thirty colts; the word שלשים, *thirty*, refers only to the mothers while the colts, since they are dependent upon their mothers, need not to be numbered separately. According to Midrashic the interpretation that males, not colts, were sent, the question arises — were there fifteen males and fifteen females for a total of שלשים, *thirty*, or were there thirty females accompanied by thirty males for a total of sixty?

Gur Aryeh interprets that there were thirty of each. *Levush Ha'Orah*, however, points out that the *Midrash* states that Jacob's tribute consisted of a total of 550 animals, but according to *Gur Aryeh*, there would have been 580! [As mentioned above, if colts were sent, they are not included in the

32 nursing camels with their colts; forty cows and ten
17-18 bulls; twenty she-donkeys and ten he-donkeys. ¹⁷ He put in his servants' charge each drove separately and said to his servants, 'Pass on ahead of me and leave a space between drove and drove.' ¹⁸ He instructed the first one as follows, 'When my brother Esau meets

total because of their relative insignificance]. *Mizrachi* and *Levush* agree that there were fifteen males and fifteen females. That the ratio was one-to-one is implied, for otherwise the Torah would have specified the respective totals.

אַחַת עֶשְׂרִים וְעֶשְׂרִים — Twenty she-donkeys and ten he-donkeys.

[The translation of עֶשְׂרִים as he-donkeys follows *Rashi* as distinct from *Targum Yonasan* who renders עֶשְׂרִים, *small colts*.]

17. עָרַר עָרַר לְבָדוֹ — Each drove separately [lit. drove, drove by itself].

— I.e., every species by itself (*Rashi*).

Jacob wanted each drove to be distinct so that Esau would take note of the proper proportion of males to females. Thereby he would realize that Jacob planned the tribute to yield him maximum productivity. For this reason, Jacob called the tribute בְּרַכְתִּי *my blessing* [33:11], because it was so constituted as to be a source of fertile blessing (*Sforno*).

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל עֲבָדָיו עֲבְרוּ מִלְּפָנַי — And [he] said to his servants, 'Pass on ahead of me [lit. before me].'

A day's journey or less, and I will come after you (*Rashi*).

That is, he would not follow too

closely behind them or all the precautions would have been useless. On the other hand, he would not follow too far behind for he told them to say [v. 18] *behold, he is also behind us* (*Ralbag*).

וַיִּצַּח אֶת הָרֶאשׁוֹן לֵאמֹר — And leave [lit. put] a space between drove and [between] drove.

— Place one drove before the other with a distance between them for as far as the eye can see, in order to satisfy the wicked Esau's greed and to amaze him with the sight of so great a gift. [Hardly will he have feasted his eyes on one set of animals than the other will begin to appear. Had all the animals been bunched together, the large number would have been less impressive] (*Rashi*).¹¹

Following *Sforno*: So the animals will not wander from drove to drove. By keeping the species separate, Jacob made apparent the the careful forethought that went into calculating the proportion of males to females to assure maximum blessing to Esau.

18. וַיִּצַּח אֶת הָרֶאשׁוֹן לֵאמֹר — [And] he instructed [lit. commanded] the first one as follows [lit. to say; saying.].

לֵאמֹר, to say, that is

1. *Ramban* cites the *Midrash* which perceives an allusion to the future, for Jacob thereby implied a prayer to the Almighty: 'Master of the Universe! If troubles come upon my children, do not bring them one after another, but let there be a breathing-space between them!'

וישלח לב/יט-כ ושאַלף לאמר למי-אתה ואנה תלך
 יט ולמי אלה לפניך: ואמרתי לעבדך
 ליעקב מנחה הוא שלוחה לארני לעשו
 כ והנה גם-הוא אחרינו: ויצו גם את-
 השני גם את-השלישי גם את-כל-
 ההלכים אחרי העדרים לאמר בדבר
 הזה תדברון אל-עשו במצאכם אתו:

לדורות, *with implication for future generations (Lekach Tov; see comm. to v. 4)*. This concept implies that Jacob's descendants, too, were to heed those instructions when encountering Esau's descendants.

למי אתה — *Whose are you?*

— That is, 'Who sent you?' The expression למי אתה, *whose are you?*, means של מי אתה, *whose [servant (Rashbam)] are you*: The prefix ל is used instead of של, *belonging to*, for example in 31:43: שלי הוא = *they are mine*; Psalms 24:1: לה הארץ, *to HASHEM is the earth*, i.e. *the earth belongs to HASHEM*.

Rashi also notes that Onkelos should read למן אף instead of למן אף as many editions have it.

ואנה תלך — *[And] where are you going?*

— That is, toward where are you headed with such a large drove? (*Or HaChaim*).

— *And whose are these that are before you?*¹¹

I.e., *to whom is this tribute being sent?* (*Rashi*).

19. — *[And] you shall say.*

— In sequential response to the questions in the order he will ask

them (*Rashi*)...

לעבדך ליעקב — *Your servant Jacob's [lit. to your servant to Jacob]*.

That is, in reply to your his question, 'Whose are you?' — you shall answer: 'I belong to your servant Jacob' [see note on the prefix ל=של above] (*Rashi*).

Rashi also notes that Onkelos should read לעבדך ליעקב instead of לעבדך ליעקב as most current editions have it.

[On Jacob's demeaning himself by his constant references to himself as 'your servant Jacob' see *comm.* to v. 5 and footnote to 25:23. Regarding God's accusation that Jacob was flattering the wicked, Jacob replied that he was doing it 'to prevent him from killing me' (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 37). The Sages (*Sotah* 41b) consider this reaction legitimate. Cf. 'What sin could Jacob have been apprehensive about?' in v. 8.]

מנחה הוא שלוחה לארני לעשו — *It is a tribute sent to my lord, to Esau.*

This is the reply to the question 'Whose are these that are before you?' [implying, as noted, 'To whom is this tribute being sent?'] — *It is a tribute sent to my lord Esau* (*Rashi*).

— It also answers the question: *Where are you going?* (*Or HaChaim*).

— *And behold he*

1. The *Maggid of Kozhnitz* interprets this in a sarcastic sense as if Esau were chiding them: 'What need has Jacob of all this material wealth? — Did he not choose a spiritual life?'

you and asks you, saying, "Whose are you, where are you going, and whose are these that are before you?" — ¹⁹ You shall say, "Your servant Jacob's. It is a tribute sent to my lord, to Esau, and behold he himself is behind us."

²⁰ He similarly instructed the second, also the third, as well as all who followed the droves, saying, 'In this manner shall you speak to Esau when you

himself [lit. also he] is behind us.

Jacob is the subject (*Rashi*).

The Sages in the *Midrash* derive a lesson from this: If you meet someone on a journey who asks many questions, always answer them, but then add, 'Another caravan is following up close.' [The sense of adding this is that if a stranger asks too many questions he may be a brigand seeking a pretext to rob or harm the defenseless traveler. He may be deterred by being told that others are following close by.]

וַיֹּצֵר גַּם אֶת־הַשֵּׁנִי גַם אֶת־הַשְּׁלִישִׁי — He similarly instructed [lit. and he commanded also] the second, also the third.

Although it would be necessary for each of the messengers to identify the origin and destination of the tribute why would each of them be required to repeat that Jacob was following close behind? — Because there was a possibility that Esau would be annoyed that Jacob would not even deign to see him in person. Therefore, Jacob insisted that his messengers stress the point that their master would soon be at hand (*Kli Yakar*).

On a deeper level, the Torah repeats this instruction to four of the groups to indicate that these in-

structions apply to Israel's relationship with each of the Four Kingdoms under whom it would be exiled (*Pesikta Zutresā; Baal Ha-Turim*).

גַּם אֶת־כָּל־הַהֹלְכִים אַחֲרֵי הָעֲדְרִים — As well as [lit. also] all who followed the droves.

Following the allusion to the future as cited in the *Midrash* above, *Sechel Tov* notes that this signifies the Fourth Exile under Edom/Rome [a general reference to the current Exile under "Western Civilization"] which, by its severity obscured the memory of the three preceding ones.

בְּדִבְרֵי הַזֶּה תִּדְבְּרוּן אֶל עֲשׂו — In this manner shall you speak to Esau.

Jacob told each of them what to say to Esau, so it would be clear that all the droves formed a single tribute dispatched by Jacob as a token to his older brother (*Sforno*).

בְּמִצְאָכֶם אֹתוֹ — When you find him.

Following the broader concept that this sequence applies as well to future generations when they have to defend themselves against aggression from Esau's descendants, the implication is: In this manner shall you speak to Esau whenever you encounter him (*R' Munk*).

— When you have no alternative but to humble yourselves to Esau,

וישלח כֹּה וַאֲמַרְתֶּם גַּם הִנֵּה עֲבַדְךָ יַעֲקֹב אַחֲרֵינוּ
 לִבְכָּא כִּי־אָמַר אֲכַפְּרָה פָּנָיו בְּמִנְחָה הֶהֱלַכְתָּ
 לִפְנֵי וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן אֶרְאֶה פָּנָיו אוֹלֵי יִשְׂאֵל

this is how you shall speak to him (Ma'or VaShemesh).

21. וַאֲמַרְתֶּם גַּם הִנֵּה עֲבַדְךָ יַעֲקֹב אַחֲרֵינוּ — *And you shall say* [i.e. be sure to add] 'Moreover, behold your servant Jacob is behind us'.

Jacob repeated this to emphasize that each of them must add this to whatever else they might say, so Esau should understand clearly that Jacob was following them to Seir to greet his brother (Sforno).

Even if Esau does not ask you any of the above questions, having heard of the tribute from the earlier messengers, nevertheless, you must take the initiative and tell him 'your servant Jacob is behind us,' so that the constant repetition of the expressions 'servant Jacob' and 'lord Esau' will ring in his ears (Ha'amek Davar).

Jacob wanted the leader of each drove to prepare Esau for an imminent meeting with him. Esau would prepare himself for an angry outburst at his hated brother — only to be confronted with another generous gift. By such repetitive appeasement, Jacob hoped to fully assuage Esau's wrath (R' Hirsch).

The leaders constantly repeated this to emphasize that Jacob was not approaching pompously like a king, but rather, graciously, with appeasement as his goal. Or, the repetition was intended to convince Esau that Jacob was not merely sending gifts and fleeing, but was indeed coming himself (Minchah Belulah).

Rashbam suggests that this was really a deception, as Jacob had really intended to flee in another direction that

night, but the struggle with the angel [v. 25] prevented him from doing so.

Following the Midrashic interpretations that this alludes to the future exiles, the message was that Esau's descendants were to be told 'Behold, your servant Jacob is behind us' — Jacob's merit stands behind us and will endure also for future generations. In the end we will be vindicated.

כִּי אָמַר אֲכַפְּרָה פָּנָיו בְּמִנְחָה הֶהֱלַכְתָּ לִפְנֵי — (For he [Jacob] said, 'I will appease him [lit. his face] with the tribute that precedes me.')

I.e., I will wipe away his anger with this gift. As Rashi explains, wipe away, remove, is the meaning of the verb כָּפַר when it occurs in conjunction with sin and figuratively with פְּנִים, [angry] face (see comm. to וְשָׂא פָנָיו below). The meaning of כָּפַר in Aramaic is to wipe. Scripturally, too, the bowls in the Sanctuary are called [Ezra 1:10] כְּפֹרִי זָהָב, kforim of gold, because the priest wiped his hands on their rims.

[Cf. Rashi to Deut. 32:43 where he similarly explains the sense of כָּפַר as appease.]

According to Rashi, Rashbam and Ibn Ezra, this phrase was not actually uttered by Jacob as part of his instructions to the messengers. Rather, it is a parenthetic third-person explanation of Jacob's motives in sending the tribute. The word said should accordingly be understood as said to himself.

Ibn Ezra interprets פָּנָיו אֲכַפְּרָה as literally: cover his face, i.e., cause his face, the barometer of his anger, to be hidden. [Compare the expression קָסוּת

find him. ²¹ And you shall say, "Moreover — Behold your servant Jacob is behind us." (For he said, 'I will appease him with the tribute that precedes me, and afterwards I will face him; perhaps he will

עֵינַיִם, eye-covering, in 20:16 implying vindication]. Radak similarly explains the literal meaning as *cover*. Cf. וְכָפַרְתָּ, אַתָּה, and you shall cover it, in 6:14.

Ramban, however, disagrees with Rashi's interpretation of the Hebrew verb כָּפַר as *wiping away*. He interprets it in the sense of a *ransom* to appease someone's anger. It is used in this sense, too, in Proverbs 16:14. Thus, in its familiar use as כִּפּוּרָה, atonement for sin, the sense of the word is that the soul is ransomed from the effects of the sin, not that the sin itself is somehow wiped away or erased [as explained in Kessef Mezukak]. The connotation of *wipe away* occurs only in Aramaic, the word *kforim* that Rashi cites from Ezra is not the Hebrew, but the Babylonian name for 'bowls.' In our verse אֶכְפֹּרְנִי figuratively connotes that Jacob was indicating that he was *ransoming* himself against Esau's wrath by means of the gifts he was sending him.

Furthermore, Ramban maintains that this phrase *did* form part of Jacob's instructions to the emissaries. They were to tell Esau that Jacob had specifically mentioned that he had sent them ahead to 'ransom' himself by means of these gifts.

וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן אֶרְאֶה פָּנָיו — And afterwards I will face him.

— Literally, *see his face*, i.e., I will pay him my respects and homage in the sense of Exodus 23:17: יֵרְאֶה ה' בְּלִיְכוּנְךָ אֶת פְּנֵי הָאֲדֹנָיִם, All your males shall appear before the face of the Lord HASHEM.

אֲוִלִּי יִשָּׂא פָנָי — Perhaps he will forgive me [lit. lift up my face].

By using the metaphor 'lifting up the face,' Jacob suggested that as long as Esau was enraged against him, he was ashamed to raise his face to look directly at Esau. By forgiving, Esau would, in effect, be lifting Jacob's downcast face (R' Hirsch).

Face figuratively connotes *anger* since one's facial expression is the barometer of his anger. Cf. I Samuel 1:18: וּפְנֵיהָ לֹא הָיוּ לָהּ עוֹד, lit. and her face was no more to her, meaning she no longer displayed a vexed countenance (Ibn Ezra; Radak; Yohel Or).

[As explained in the comm. to 19:21, the expression *lift up the face* occurs again in the expression בֵּרַכְתָּ בְּהִנֵּה, בֵּרַכְתָּ בְּהִנֵּה, Priestly Blessing, in Num. 6:26: וְשָׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ (lit. 'may HASHEM lift up His face unto you,') which Rashi there explains as: *May HASHEM suppress His anger toward you*. Ibn Ezra there elaborates that the connotation is the opposite connotation of Isaiah 1:15: אָעֲלִים עֵינַי מִכֶּם, I will avert My eyes from you. In the Priestly Blessing, the connotation is: Wherever you turn, His face will be lifted up toward you in benevolence (for one who is angry at another averts his face from him — cf. Deut. 31:18. (When one lifts his face toward someone, it is evident that he bears no ill-will). Compare also the opposite connotation of *to turn back the face* of a supplicant in I Kings 2:16.]

R' Hirsch notes that פָּנִים, face, from פָּנָה, to turn, means the attitude or direction taken by someone; the face is the part of the body expressing that trend. Accordingly, פָּנִים is used to express both a friendly and an unfriendly mood. See both Proverbs 16:15 and Psalms 34:17.

According to Ramban cited above, the connotation is: perhaps he will accept me and allow me to be among 'those who see the king's face.'

וישלח כב פָּנָיו: וַתַּעֲבֹר הַמִּנְחָה עַל-פָּנָיו וְהוּא לֹן
 לב/כב-כג כב בְּלִילָה-הָיָהוּא בְּמַחֲנֶה: וַיָּקָם | בְּלִילָה הוּא
 וַיָּקָח אֶת-שְׁתֵּי נָשָׁיו וְאֶת-שְׁתֵּי שַׁפְחֹתָיו
 וְאֶת-אֶחָד עֶשֶׂר יְלָדָיו וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת מַעְבַּר

22. — So [lit. and] the tribute passed on before him [lit. upon his face.]

— Jacob reviewed the procession to make certain that everything was just as he had intended it to be (Abarbanel; Sforno).

Our translation follows Rashi who cites parallels in Jeremiah 6:7 and 65:3 where על פָּנָיו, upon his face, is synonymous with לְפָנָיו, before him.

Rashi cites the Midrash, however, that since the verse uses על פָּנָיו instead of לְפָנָיו, the term is intended to allude to the word פָּנָיו, [Esau's angry] face, in the previous verse. The verse suggests that Jacob, too, was angry — the tribute passed on before him פָּנָיו, in his [Jacob's] anger — Jacob was incensed that he needed to do all this.

Shem MiShmuel explains the implication of Rashi to be that Jacob's anger was directed at himself, since he felt that his action reflected a compromise of his own complete faith. He reasoned that were he to have put his unequivocal trust in God, he would not have found it necessary to resort to all this.

— והוא לֹן בְּלִילָה-הָיָהוּא בְּמַחֲנֶה [lit. and] he spent that night in the camp.

— Not in his tent, but in the camp together with his servants, dressed for combat, should his brother come at night and attack him (Ramban).

According to the Midrash: And he spent that night in the camp — supplicating for God's mercy.

The division of the camps [v. 8] is not mentioned here. Perhaps, as

Abarbanel suggests, Jacob slept in the camp where his wives were; or as Haamek Davar offers, Jacob had reunited the camps once he saw that Esau had not attacked that day.

[The contrasting sense — while he spent — is suggested by the subject + predicate arrangement לֹן והוא instead of the converse arrangement והוא לֹן. Comp. comm. to 14:18, top of page 494.]

23. Jacob moves his encampment.

וַיָּקָם בְּלִילָה הוּא — But he got up [in] that night.

— He arose while it was still night, having slept a short while in order to move his encampment under the cover of dark (Radak).

R' Hirsch suggests that Jacob's first intention was to stay overnight on that side of the Jabbok, but then his uneasiness gave him no rest.

Most commentators interpret that in crossing the Jabbok, Jacob was proceeding toward Esau.

According to Rashbam, however, as noted above (v. 21) it was Jacob's real intention to flee in the dark of night away from Esau. We find that David, too, when fleeing from Absalom, crossed the Jordan at night and traversed these same areas [see II Samuel 17].

ההוא lacks the definite article ה. As noted in 19:32 and 30:16 this omission is not grammatically unusual.

Midrashically, however, as noted there, the anomalous form הוא [lit. he] in place of the regular form הוּא refers to God — the He par excellence. Midrash Lekach Tov remarks: The pro-

32 forgive me.').²² So the tribute passed on before him
22-24 while he spent that night in the camp.

²³ But he got up that night and took his two wives,
his two handmaids and his eleven sons and crossed
the ford of the Jabbok. ²⁴ And when he took them

noun הוא, *He*, indicates that the Holy One, Blessed be He, was with him to assist him.

וַיִּקַּח אֶת שְׁתֵּי נָשָׁיו ... וְאֵת אֲחֵר עֶשָׂר
וְלָדָיו – And [he] took his two wives,
[and] his two handmaids and his
eleven sons.

– To the edge of the stream
(Radak; see Ramban below).

There is no significance to the order in which Jacob transported them. [Here the wives are mentioned first whereas in 31:17 his children are mentioned first, while below in 33:6 the handmaids are mentioned first] (Ramban).

That the commentators in 31:17 explain why Jacob gave precedence to his children [see there] is not contradicted by his opposite order of priorities here. Abarbanel suggests that Jacob brought the mothers to cross the ford first so his children could watch them and would not be afraid to cross themselves.

Only his eleven sons are mentioned; where was his daughter Dinah?

Dinah was included with his wives. She was with Leah, since a daughter stays near her mother (Radak).

– Rashi cites the Midrashic interpretation that Jacob concealed

Dinah in a chest and locked it, so Esau should not cast his glance on her [and desire to marry her]. Because Jacob kept her from Esau on whom she might have had a good influence, he was punished by her later abduction by Shechem [see chap. 34].¹¹

וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת מַעְבְּרַת יַבְבֹּק – And [he] crossed the ford of the Jabbok.

The verb *crossed* is in the singular: Jacob gathered his wives and children at the edge of the brook, and he alone traversed the ford of Jabbok to see if its waters were high, then he returned and led them across together (Ramban).

מַעְבְּרַת, *ford*, is the shallow place in a stream where it may be crossed. Every stream and river has a commonly known fording place [therefore its precise location is not further identified] (Radak).

The river Jabbok (today known as Nahr ez-Zerqa, so called because of its blue waters) is a tributary of the Jordan, half way between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. With its deep banks, the river is a natural boundary. The southwest stretch formed the boundary between Ammon and the Emorites [Deut. 3:16; Josh. 12:4], and its lower courses formed the boundaries between

1. Comp. the Midrash:

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Jacob, '... You were unwilling to have her marry one who is circumcised [Esau], she will soon marry one who is uncircumcised; you were unwilling to give her in legitimate marriage; she will soon be wed in a forbidden union.'

[Although a father could hardly be faulted for not wanting his child to marry an Esau, Jacob was punished for seeking to prevent such a marriage. The masters of Mussar explain that he should have been saddened that his duty as a father forced him to deprive Esau of the beneficial influence of Dinah. Instead, he hid her without feeling compassion for Esau.]

וּשְׁלַח כִּי יָבֹק: וַיָּקָחם וַיַּעֲבֵרם אֶת־הַנָּחַל וַיַּעֲבֹר
לְבַכְרֶכָּה כִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ: וַיּוֹתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ וַיֵּאָבֶק

the kingdoms of Sichon and Og [Josh. 11:22]. The lower courses also divided Gilead into two parts [Deut. 3:12, 16; Joshua 12:2-6] (R' Hoffmann).

24. וַיָּקָחם וַיַּעֲבֵרם אֶת־הַנָּחַל — *And when he took them and had them cross over the stream.*

— Having first tested it and assured himself that the waters were not too high (Radak).

[The translation 'and when ...' is suggested idiomatically by the use of the double conversive verbs.]

וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ — [And, i.e., then] *he sent over all his possessions* [lit. *all that were his*].

— His cattle and movables. Jacob acted as a ferryman [וָשָׂר; or according to others: as a *bridge* (וָשָׂר), i.e., he stood in the middle of the water], bringing things from one side of the river to the other (Rashi citing Midrash).

The commentators note that the current of the Jabbok is very swift. During the greater part of its course, it flows through a deep and narrow valley, with steep precipitous side. Certainly, transporting an entire camp over the river, and that at night, was quite an undertaking.

25. The Struggle with the Angel

וַיּוֹתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ — [And] *Jacob was left alone* [lit. *himself*].

According to the literal sense, the previous verse indicates that after Jacob accompanied his family across the river, he returned and

ordered the others to cross the brook before him. As this verse informs us, he remained behind (Ramban).

He stayed behind to supervise as everyone crossed and to ascertain that nothing had been overlooked (Ibn Ezra; Sforno).

Following Rashbam's interpretation, this was part of the subterfuge: Jacob purposely stayed behind so he could flee in an opposite direction.

Rashi cites the Talmudic interpretation [Chullin 91a], that Jacob had forgotten some *פָּחִים קְטָנִים*, *small earthenware pitchers*, and returned to fetch them.¹¹

The Talmudic interpretation is based on a Scriptural allusion, perceiving the Midrashic connotation of *לָבָדּוֹ*, *himself*, to be *לָבָדּוֹ*, *for his vessel*. Alternately, *לָבָדּוֹ* is interpreted to mean: *for his father's vessel in which pressed oil is stored* (Da'as Zekeinim).

Cf. Da'as Zekeinim to 45:20: (Pharaoh said to Joseph) ... *Do not mind your belongings* [lit. *vessels*] — Pharaoh knew that Joseph's father had meticulously cared for even insignificant earthenware jugs at a time of danger. He therefore told Joseph's brothers to inform Jacob that he should not let concern over his belongings delay his trip to Egypt.

R' Bachya offers that these were pitchers used for carrying water; Jacob risked his life to fetch them out of concern for his children who might otherwise suffer from thirst on the journey. [Accordingly *פָּחִים קְטָנִים* would not mean *small pitchers* but *pitchers of the young children* (Toras Chessed).]

1. The Sages [Chullin ibid.] derive from the fact that Jacob risked his life by returning that night for small pitchers, that 'to the righteous, their money is dearer to them than their bodies' — the reason being that they never take anything that is not theirs. [I.e., whatever the righteous acquire is by their toil and honest dealing; accordingly since their money comes to them with great difficulty, it is symbolic of their unflinching adherence to the laws of the Torah. Therefore, they take scrupulous care of their possessions. (See Overview).]

and had them cross over the stream, he sent over all his possessions.

²⁵ Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with

The *Midrash* preserves an opinion that among these pitchers was the jar of oil which Jacob was Providentially provided when he anointed the pillar at Bethel/Luz [see on 28:18]. The jar was endowed with miraculous properties and certainly contained an inexhaustible supply of oil. Jacob foresaw that with the oil from this same cruse, miracles would be performed by Elijah for the woman of Tzarefath [*I Kings* 17:16], and by Elisha [*II Kings* 4:1. Accordingly, Jacob returned for it in the dark of night, though a righteous person usually does not venture out alone at night (*Tanchuma Ki Sisa; Peskita d' Rav Kahana*).

וַיִּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ — And a man wrestled with him.^[1]

The Rabbis explained that this 'man' was the Guardian angel of Esau [in the guise of a man] (*Rashi*).

Tanchuma identifies this angel as Samael, generally considered the angel of evil (see *Overview*).

There are other opinions are that this angel was not functioning in an evil role, but in a kindly one. *Tanchuma* records an opinion that God, in His mercy, dispatched the angel Michael in the guise of a shepherd, to strive with

Jacob, who was afraid of Esau, in order to encourage him. Jacob's victory in the struggle would give him the necessary confidence to face Esau.

R' Bachya perceives this as symbolizing the righteous person's inner struggle against the forces of evil (Cf. *Malbim*).

According to *Rashbam*, the angel's purpose was to prevent Jacob from fleeing so that Jacob would see God keep His promise that Esau would not harm him.

Sforno comments that the angel was undoubtedly dispatched by God to pave the way for Jacob's ultimate salvation. The Patriarch would suffer material losses as a result of the struggle, but he would emerge with an even greater victory and blessing as a result.

While the verb וַיִּאָבֵק is generally understood to mean *wrestled*, its derivation from the root verb אָבַק is variously interpreted:

Rashi, quoting *Menachem*, derives it from אָבַק, *dust*, implying that in combat men cover themselves with the dust which was raised by the vigorous movement of their feet. [Cf. *Ibn Ezra* who interprets similarly, and *Chullin* 91a where it is noted that the dust reached God's Throne of Glory. (See *Chiddushei HaRashba*, and *Maharsha*).]

1. *Rambam* [*Moreh Nevuchim* 2:43] regards this incident as a prophetic vision [just as he regards Abraham's vision of the three angels in *Vayeira*, 18:2ff]. *Ramban* [in *comm.* to 18:1] challenges this vigorously, posing many questions [for example: If Jacob's wrestling was only a vision, why did he limp when he awoke?]

Ramban agrees with *Rambam* to the extent that whenever seeing or hearing an angel is described in the Torah, it refers to a vision, since the human senses cannot perceive an angel. (Such a vision, however, is still below the level of prophecy.) However, wherever the Torah specifically depicts angels garbed in human appearance as *men*, as in our case, then these angels are endowed with what Kabbalists describe as a 'garment', and are thus sensually perceptible to the human vision of the pious and disciples of the prophets even when they are awake. *Ramban* concludes 'I can explain no further.'

Abarbanel cites *Rabag* who, in defense of *Ramban*, holds that Jacob's hip injury might have been caused by autosuggestion, an aftermath of the prophetic vision.

Radak suggests that God caused Jacob to limp after he awoke from the prophetic vision as a sign of His displeasure that Jacob had 'limped' indecisively in fear of Esau, and failed to place his unequivocal trust in God.

וישלח לבכורו כו איש עמו עד עלות השחר: וירא כי לא יכל לו ויגע בכף ירכו ותקע בכף ירכו כו יעקב בהאבקו עמו: ויאמר שלחני כי

Rashi himself relates the sense of the verb אבק to its Aramaic meaning of join, intertwine, figuratively in the manner of wrestlers who clasp, and whose arms are intertwined, around one another. Ramban notes in this context that the Aramaic אבק is equivalent to the Hebrew חבק, embrace, the א and ח being interchangeable. However, he interprets the primary sense of the word as does Menachem, agreeing with the Midrash.

עד עלות השחר – Until the break [lit. rise] of dawn.¹¹

I.e., until the 'departure' of the night, blackness, of night. Alternatively, שחר refers to the appearance of the first rays of daylight through the clouds before sunrise (*Ibn Ezra*).

In the figurative sense, reflecting Israel's destiny in Exile:

The angel – representative of the Edomite Empire – will fight with Jacob's descendants, wrestling with them to lead them astray from God's path until the break of dawn – the dawn, Israel's salvation, when the long night of exile will finally end (*Lekach Tov*).

26. וירא כי לא יכל לו – When [lit. and] he [=the angel] perceived that he could not overcome him.

Though an angel's strength is superior to a human's, he could not overcome Jacob because God restrained him from inflicting permanent damage (*Ramban* according to *Tur*). An angel merely 'fulfills God's Word' [see *Psalms* 103:20],

and had been commissioned only to strain Jacob's thigh (*Ramban*).

According to *Sforno*: The angel could not overcome him because Jacob cleaved tenaciously to God, in thought and speech.

ויגע בכף ירכו – [And] he struck [or: gripped (lit. touched)] the socket of his hip.

This caused Jacob to limp. This laming of Jacob was in retribution for his wish to flee and not rely on God's promise of protection. We similarly find of all those who wished to flee against God's will that they were likewise punished: Since Moses was hesitant to go on God's mission, an angel met him on the way with intent to kill him [*Exod.* 4:24]; Jonah who fled from his mission to prophesy against Nineveh, was swallowed by the fish [*Jonah* 2:2]; and Balaam was punished for undertaking his ill-intended journey by being maimed [*Numb.* 22:25] (*Rashbam*).

The angel informed Jacob of the sins of the future leaders of Israel. In his agony, he stopped concentrating on God [see *Sforno*, previous s.v.], thus enabling the angel to hurt him (*Sforno*).

Seeking a sin that would make Jacob vulnerable to harm, the angel saw only one sin that had Jacob committed – that of marrying two sisters. Therefore, the

1. The Sages [*Chullin* 91a] derive from our verse that a scholar should not venture out at night (since in fact, Jacob remained alone at night and was harmed (*Rashi*); and we see (next verse) that the angel was able to exert power over him only at night, not by day (*R' Gershom*).] Others derive it from 22:3: And Abraham awoke early in the morning [i.e. waiting until morning rather than venturing out alone at night. See *comm.* there and *Tosafos, Pesachim* 4a].

The parallel citation in *Berachos* 43b and *Pesachim* 112b broaden this prohibition to apply to everyone, not only to scholars.

him until the break of dawn.²⁶ When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the socket of his hip. So Jacob's hip-socket was dislocated as he wrestled with him.²⁷ And he said, 'Let me go, for

angel maimed him at his hip joint — near the organ of cohabitation, by which he had sinned (R' Bachya).

According to *Baal HaTurim*, Esau's guardian angel wanted to maim Jacob so as to disqualify him from performing sacrificial services, one of the privileges that went with the birthright he purchased from Esau [see on 25:31].

The *Midrash* understands the angel's act as an attempt to harm Jacob's act as an attempt to harm Jacob's descendants [lit. the issue of his loins]. Specifically, this referred to the Jews of the 'generation of religious persecution' during the reign of Hadrian [117-138 C.E.], the Roman Emperor who crushed Bar Kochba's revolt. [The sense of the verse according to the *Midrash* is: The angel perceived that he could not harm Jacob personally, so he inflicted harm on his descendants.]¹¹

The Sages said of that brutal period: 'Other generations will have to seek favor like a poor man begging charity, but the generation of the persecution [specifically the Hadrianic persecution of 135 C.E.] will be able to ask for it as a laborer demanding his wages' [i.e., they

will have suffered so much that they will be entitled to Divine mercy] (*Midrash HaGadol*; comp. *Ramban* in footnote).

The Hebrew for hip-socket is כף הירך, lit. spoon of the thigh, referring to the muscle-structure over the thigh bone that is convex like the ladle [spoon] of a pot (*Rashi*).

The verb נגע essentially means touching. Whenever it is followed with the preposition כ [נגע ב-] it denotes an improper touching; frequently also a violent gripping. Thus in *Job* 1:19: וניגע בארבע פנות הבית, [the storm] struck the house on all four sides and pulled it down (*Heidenheim*; R' Hirsch).

ונתקע כף-ירך יעקב — So [lit. and] Jacob's hip socket was dislocated.

The word נתקע means dislocated. Cf. *Jeremiah* 6:8 where the word has the sense of removed, cf. the Mishnaic term קעקעץ, to uproot (*Rashi*).

27. ויאמר — And he [=the angel] said.

1. *Ramban* similarly cites *Bereishis Rabbah* (77:4) which interprets the angel's success in injuring Jacob's thigh as an allusion to the Roman persecutions of later years when they nearly succeeded in uprooting יצחק ירך יעקב, future offspring of Jacob.

Ramban explains that the wound inflicted on Jacob's thigh, which is in the area of the loins, portended a future danger that Esau's offspring, Rome, might come close to mortally wounding Jacob's posterity. This indeed happened during the time of R' Yehudah ben Bava who lived two generations after the destruction of the Second Temple. That was the time when Emperor Hadrian made it a capital offense to spread Torah and Judaism. R' Yehudah himself was murdered for ordaining five of the leading scholars of the period. R' Akiva and others were tortured to death and R' Shimon bar Yochai and others had to flee for their lives and go into hiding. Of this period, R' Chiyya bar Abba commented: 'Were a person to tell me, "Give your life for the Sanctification of God's Name", I would give it, providing only that they slay me immediately. But the דור השקמה, generation of religious persecution, I could not endure!'

Ramban concludes that in other generations, even greater atrocities have been and would be perpetrated against Israel [truly prophetic words in the context of our century!]. But Israel's assurance and consolation, too, is found in the aftermath of the struggle: ויבא יעקב שלם, and Jacob came intact (33:18); whatever tribulations Israel will undergo, it will emerge intact and in peace.

וישלח עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶשְׁלַחְךָ כִּי אִם־
 לִבְכוּכָה כֵּת כֹּחַ בְּרַכְתָּנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מִה־שָּׁמָּה וַיֹּאמֶר
 כֵּת יַעֲקֹב: וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאמֶר עוֹד שָׁמָּה
 כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּי־שָׁרִיתָ עִם־אֱלֹהִים

supplacated, and v. 29 proves that it was Jacob who prevailed. [In his comm. to v. 29, s. v. אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל, Rashi explains the nature of the angel's supplication.]

— And I must say praises by day to God (Rashi).¹¹

Radak suggests that this was the angel's polite way of saying, 'I have fulfilled my mission. Unless you require me any further, I will now depart.' By adding *for dawn has broken*, the angel implied: Do not fear that I am leaving you here alone at night; *dawn is breaking*, it will soon be light.

— Dawn is breaking — and you must be on your way [for Esau will be arriving shortly] (Rashbam; Alshich).

The angel's plea to be let go illustrates how strong a grip Jacob must have had on him. The angel was unable to loosen it (*Abarbanel*), and under his mandate to wrestle with Jacob, the angel considered himself Jacob's prisoner (*R' Bachya*).

The prophet Hosea [12:5] evokes the Patriarch's struggle: *So he strove with an angel and he prevailed; he wept and he made supplication to him.* The Sages, in *Chullin* 92a observe that it is not clear from that ambiguous verse *who* prevailed: the angel or Jacob; or whether it was the angel who wept and supplacated or Jacob. They cite our verse to prove that it was the angel who wept and

supplacated, and v. 29 proves that it was Jacob who prevailed. [In his comm. to v. 29, s. v. אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל, Rashi explains the nature of the angel's supplication.]

— And he [= Jacob] said, 'I will not let you go.'

This illustrates the Sages' dictum that 'the righteous are greater than the ministering angels' [since Jacob had the power to grant or deny the angel's wish] (*Sforno*).

— Unless you bless me.

— Unless you will acknowledge my right to the blessings which my father has bestowed upon me and which Esau disputes (*Rashi*).

It is not entirely clear how *Rashi* derives this connotation from the passage. Some suggest that he derives it from the past tense *כִּרְכַּנְתִּי*, rather than *תִּכְרַכְנִי* (*Sifsei Chachomim; Bertinoro*). Others suggest that the endorsement of Jacob's right to the blessing is evident from the angel's response; hence, *Rashi* assumes that this was the original intent of Jacob's request (*Mizrachi*).

[It is possible that *Rashi's* exegesis is based on his interpretation that the angel was the Guardian Angel of Esau. What better blessing could Jacob possibly ask of this angel of Esau than an acknowledgment of his right to Isaac's blessings — and hence, a removal of the cause for Esau's hatred?] ¹²

1. Cf. *Chullin* 91b:

'Let me go, for dawn has broken.

'Are you a thief or a kidnapper that you are afraid of the morning?' Jacob asked.

'I am an angel,' he replied, 'and from the day that I was created, my time to sing praises [to HASHEM] has not come until now.' [*Yafeh Toar* interprets the angel's remark to be: 'It is now my time to sing before God as I do every day, and if I miss this — regardless of the legitimate excuse I would have — I will never again be allowed to chant before Him.']

According to the *Zohar* [*Tazria* 45a] the powers of the emissaries of evil are restrained when light appears, for then the community of Israel communes with God. Thus this guardian angel of Esau felt that if dawn would come, he would be rendered powerless.

32 dawn has broken.'

28-29 And he said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'..

²⁸ He said to him, 'What is your name?'

He replied, 'Jacob.'

²⁹ He said, 'No longer will it be said that your name is Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with the

According to Rashbam: 'Bless me that I will suffer no further harm from you.' Jacob asked for the blessing now, with daybreak, because he realized that his assailant was an angel.

28. Jacob is informed that his name will be changed to Israel.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מֶה-שֵּׁמְךָ [And] he [the angel] said to him, 'What is your name?'

The question was rhetorical, like God's question to Adam in 3:9: 'Where are you?', designed merely to initiate conversation. Obviously, the angel already knew Jacob's name since he had been sent to Jacob (Radak).

29. לֹא יִעָקֵב יִאֲמָר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ — No longer will it be said that your name is Jacob.

I.e., it will no longer be said that your name Jacob [derived from עָקַב, meaning *heel*; *outwitting*; *deceit*] suits you and that you attained the blessings by עָקַבָּה, *outwitting and deceit* [as Esau indeed charged in 27:36] (Rashi)...

כִּי אִשְׂרָאֵל — But Israel [=pre-
vailing; superiority].

Continuing Rashi ... But [it will

be said] that you attained the blessings through *prevailing* [יִשְׁרָאֵל = שְׁרָרָה] and in an open manner. [It was not, as Mizrahi points out, the angel who was now renaming Jacob; nor was this name-change to be effective immediately, for the angel did not say, 'no longer shall your name be called Jacob. The angel was merely revealing to Jacob what God Himself would do later. Jacob would later be regarded as Israel — which would be interpreted as tacit acknowledgment of his superiority (from שְׁרָר) and his legitimate right to his father's blessings].

As Rashi continues the angel's dialogue: '... For later on, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will reveal Himself to you in Bethel [see 35:10]. There, He will change your name and bless you. I, too, will be there and acknowledge your right to the blessing. [For it is the angel who, in the following phrase, interprets the significance of the new name: *for you have striven*, etc. That concept is not repeated in 35:10.]

Rashi continues that this angel's response is alluded to in *Hoshea* 12:5, *And he strove with an angel and*

2. R' David Feinstein cites in this connection *Taanis* 20a: *Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are importunate* [Proverbs 27:6] — Better is the curse of Ahijah the Shilonite [I Kings 14:15] than the blessings with which Balaam the wicked blessed them [Numbers 24:6]. Since the angel was the heavenly representative of Esau's destiny, we may assume that Jacob, too, would have shunned a blessing by an adversary; only confirmation of a previous blessing would have been an appropriate request under the circumstances.

וישלה לבל-לא
ועם-אנשים ותוכל: וישאל יעקב ויאמר
הגידה-נא שמך ויאמר למה זה תשאל
לשמי ויברך אתו שם: ויקרא יעקב שם

prevailed; he [=the angel] wept and made supplication to him [=Jacob.] What was the angel's supplication? [As that verse continues]: ... 'At Bethel He will meet us and there He will speak with us' i.e., implying the supplication: 'Please wait until He will speak with us there [and there I will acknowledge your right to the blessings]. Jacob, however, would not agree to this [delay], and against his own wish [the angel] had to acknowledge [Jacob's] right to the blessings. That is the implication of [v. 30]: 'And he blessed him there' — for the angel had begged Jacob to wait, but he refused to do so. [Jacob did not release the angel until he blessed him].¹¹

R' Yanai said: God associated His Name (אל) with Israel's. This is like a king who has a small key to open the door of his palace. He says to himself, 'I'll lose the key if I leave it as it is, so I'll attach a string to it in order to find it more easily if it gets lost.' God — if one may use the analogy — did the same for Israel. 'If I leave Israel alone,' He said, 'This people will become lost among the nations. But I shall attach My Name to Israel, so that this people can survive' (Yerushalmi Taanis 2:6).

The Talmudic prohibition (Berachos 13a) of referring to Abraham as Abram does not apply to Jacob/Israel, whom even the Torah continues to call Jacob in 46:2, showing clearly that he retained that name. [See comm. pp. 563-564. In any event, the angel, as noted, did not now re-name Jacob, as this was not part of his mission, nor was he authorized to do so. He was merely foretelling that God would later give Jacob his

additional name Israel (see 35:10).]

As the Sages in the Midrash observe, the prohibition of calling Abraham 'Abram' is not analogous to Jacob/Israel since it was taught: It was not intended that the name 'Jacob' should be abolished, rather Israel was to be the principal name, and 'Jacob' a subsidiary one. According to R' Acha, the verse reads [35:10]: Your name is Jacob, however, Israel shall [also] be your name: Jacob was to remain the principal name, Israel was added as a subsidiary to it.

כי שרית עם-אלהים ועם אנשים ותוכל
— For you have striven with the Divine and with the human [lit. men] and [you] have overcome [lit. been able].

I.e., you have overcome them (Rashi).

[Thus the name Yisrael is explained as composition of ישרה, to prevail, with אל, the divine. This interpretation of the significance of the name is not repeated later in 35:10.] Divine refers not to God, but to the angel (Midrash). [This is often the sense of אלהים in Scripture; cf. בני אלהים in 6:2 and Job 1:6].

For you have striven with the Divine — i.e. with the angel, inasmuch as you wrestled with me and I could not defeat you; and with men — Laban and Esau — who intend to harm you but are unable to. For just as this occurred to you with Laban, it shall happen to you

1. Jacob requested the angel's blessing just as the angels who visited Abraham conferred a blessing on him before they departed [18:10]. The angel responded that those angels were commissioned to bless Abraham; he, however, had no such mission, and he could not bless on his own initiative. Jacob implored him to at least confirm the blessings his father had already given him. In trepidation the angel referred to the case of those angels at the destruction of Sodom who revealed something to Lot on their own initiative and were banished from their Divine abode for a period of 138 years [see 19:13]. Nevertheless, Jacob prevailed and the angel was forced to bless him (Zohar).

³⁰ Then Jacob inquired, and he said: 'Divulge, if you please, your name.'

And he said, 'Why then do you inquire of my name?' And he blessed him there.

with Esau and his chieftains (Radak).

[The translation *striven* for שרית follows the familiar understanding of the verb in the context of this verse, following B'chor Shor. The root is perceived by most exegetes to be cognate to שר superior, noble, prince, hence prevail. Accordingly, several alternate interpretations are offered]:

Ralbag renders: For you are considered a שר, prince, [i.e. great], among the angels in recognition of the extent of the Providence exercised over you, and your greater closeness to God.

Onkelos renders שרית as *have become mighty* and אלהים as *implying before God*.

The Midrash perceives this as an allusion that Jacob was a prince in God's presence, since his features are inscribed beneath the Heavenly Throne, as it were.

Depending upon the various interpretations of the stich, the word אלהים assumes different meanings [Divine beings or God]. Accordingly, there is a difference of opinion whether the word is sacred [i.e. subject to erasure] or non-sacred (Minchas Shay).

30. הִגִּידָהּ נָא שְׁמִי — Divulge, [lit. tell] if you please, your name.

Jacob knew that an angel exists only to perform specific functions assigned by God. As such, his name is temporary and reflects whatever mission he was to perform [see Rashi below]. Because the angel had informed Jacob of his new name, Israel, Jacob was curious to know the angel's mission (Radak; B'chor Shor; Or HaChaim).

— Tell me your essence and

character so I will be able to deduce the transgression for which you were sent to wrestle with me, and I will repent of it and pray (Sforno).

וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה תִּשְׁאַל לְשִׁמִּי — And he [the angel] said, 'Why then do you inquire of my name?'

— We angels have no set names; they change in accordance with the missions entrusted to us (Midrash; Rashi).

Following Radak: 'You have no need to know my name.' The angel gave a similar answer to Manoach [Judges 13:18]: *Why do you ask after my name seeing that it is hidden?* — I do not know my name at any given moment, for it is subject to constant change [cf. Midrash] 78:4]. ... Manoach, however, did not know that he was addressing an angel.

— Sforno: Our essence is spiritual and cannot be communicated in human terminology for it is hidden [ibid.], and its function depends on God's will.

Of what use could the knowledge of my name be to you? I am powerless except for HASHEM. Should you summon me, I would not respond nor can I help you in your distress.' But the angel blessed him for he had been commissioned to do so (Ramban; Tur).

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם — And he blessed him there.

I.e., he thereby acknowledged Jacob's right to the blessings —

וישלח לב/לב-לג זב המקום פניאל כי-ראיתי אלהים פנים אל-פנים ותנצל נפשי: ויזרח-לו השמש כאשר עבר את-פנואל והוא צלע על-רכו: על-כן לא-יאכלו בני-ישראל את-גיד הנשה אשר על-כף הירך עד היום

implicit in the revelation regarding the name change. The angel was forced to give the blessing *then*, since Jacob would not permit him to wait for the later revelation in Bethel (*Rashi* v. 29; *Ramban*).

[The sense of *Rashi*, then, is that this phrase summarizes the *above* incident, the sense being: *Thus, he blessed him there.*]

According to *Radak* and *Alshich* the angel gave him an *additional* [unrecorded] blessing in addition to the name-change. The word *שם* there, is added since this was also in addition to the blessing which would later be conferred upon Jacob in Bethel.

HaKsav V'HaKaballah suggests that the sense of *he blessed* is that he *took leave* of him. Cf. 47:10: *And Jacob blessed Pharaoh* where *Rashi* explains: *he saluted him* and departed. [Comp. *Rashi* to 33:11 s.v. קָח-נָא.]

31. פניאל — Peniel [lit. *Face of God*].

In v. 32 the name is given as *פְּנוֹאֵל*, *Penuel*. Both names are identical since the letters פ, נ, ה, א are interchangeable (*Radak*). Or *Ha-Chaim* suggests that only Jacob called it Peniel. Everyone else referred to it as Penuel, as it is also called in *Judges* 8:8-17, and in *I Kings* 12:25.

For Jacob, the name *פניאל* has a first-person connotation — פָּנִי, *my face* (toward) *God*. But for future

generations the place name will signify: *פְּנוֹאֵל*, *Turn to God* [פָּנוּ = *turn*] (*R' Munk*).

כי ראיתי אלהים פנים אל פנים — *For I have seen the Divine face to face.*

I.e., *I have seen angels of God face to face* (*Onkelos*).

The mere sight of an angel would certainly not have inspired this awe in Jacob; he had *seen* angels before. Rather the sense of *seeing face to face* is *to face in combat*, as in *II Kings* 14:11 (*Or HaChaim*).

[Cf. *comm.* to *Deut.* 5:4].

According to *Radak*, Jacob expressed this feeling because it was the first time he had ever had the awesome experience of seeing an angel garbed in a physical appearance.

ותנצל נפשי — *Yet my life* [lit. *soul*] *was saved*.

— Though I have seen a godly being. This is to be understood in light of the awesome prohibition of *Exodus* 33:20: *You cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me and live* (*Kli Yakar*).

Compare *Manoach's* apprehension that he and his wife would die after having seen an angel in *Judges* 13:22 (*R' Shmuel ben Chafni Gaon*).

32. ויזרח לו השמש כאשר עבר את פנואל — [And] the sun rose for him as he passed Penuel.

The term לו, *for him* or *upon him*, is idiomatic; it does not mean

³² The sun rose for him as he passed Peniel and he was limping on his hip. ³³ Therefore the Children of Israel are not to eat the displaced sinew on the hip-

..

to imply that the sun rose *only* for him, but not for others. In the common idiom, people say 'When we arrived there, the sun rose for us.' [I.e., the light of the sun, which had already risen east of him, now reached him (Chomas Anach).] Midrashically, however, the phrase is interpreted literally: Did the sun rise for Jacob alone? Did it not rise for the whole world? The answer given is that] the sun rose *for him*, i.e., for his needs — to heal his lameness in the manner metaphorically expressed in Malachi 3:20: *The sun of righteousness with healing in its wings*. When Jacob left Beersheba, the sun had set *before* its time on his account [see on 28:11]; it now made up for that by rising *before* its time *for him*, on his account (Rashi; Chullin 91b).

וְהָיָה צֶלֶעַ עַל יָרֵכָה — And he was limping on his hip.

— He had already been limping before the sun rose (Rashi); i.e., when the sun rose, it found him limping, and its rays healed him (Sforno).⁽¹⁾

33. The prohibition of eating the tendon of an animal's thigh.

כֹּן עַל כֹּן — Therefore.

1. The verse alludes to the fact that our suffering appears more difficult to bear when the sun of freedom begins to shine on us. As long as the children of Israel suffer in exile, they bear their misfortunes, injuries, and ordeals in silence. But when the sun of liberation rises and begins to shine, they feel their past suffering more acutely. Israel becomes aware of the fact that it 'limps upon its thigh', and is surprised at the extent of its own endurance (Zohar cited by R'Munk).

2. In his commentary on the Mishnah, ad. loc., Rambam follows the opinion of R' Yehudah,

— In commemoration of Jacob's prowess, and the miracle God wrought to save him from death (Rashbam) ...

Sforno: By not eating that part of the thigh, Jews demonstrate that the limb in which Jacob was injured is unessential to us.

Tur: In punishment for having left their father alone and prone to the angel's assault.

לֹא יֵאָכְלוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל — The children of Israel are not to eat.

The Talmud [Chullin 101b] observes that as the law is formulated it refers not narrowly to the children of Jacob [Reuben, Simeon, Levi, etc.] but to the children of Israel, a more general designation by which they were primarily called after the Giving of the Torah at Sinai. Accordingly, the Sages note that this law was instituted at Sinai, but was inserted here parenthetically in its present place so that the reason for its prohibition would be known.

R' Yehudah in the Talmud (ibid.) differs with the Sages and Jacob's own children were required to observe this prohibition.⁽²⁾

אֶת גִּיד הַחֲשֵׁה — The displaced sinew [R' Hirsch: sinew of weakness.]

The Hebrew lit. means: the sinew

ויושלח לגוא
 א וישא יעקב עיניו וירא והנה עשו בא
 ויגוע בכף-ירך יעקב בגיד הנשה:
 ועמו ארבע מאות איש ויחץ את-

that jumped. Why is it so called? Because it *jumped* and was displaced from its proper position. Cf. this meaning of the verb נשׂה in Jeremiah 51:30 and 61:51 (Rashi from Chullin 91a).

[There are two *primary* tissues which are forbidden in the hind quarter: the consumption of the inner sinew — the sciatic nerve — near the bone, is forbidden by Torah law; the outer sinew — the common peroneal nerve — near the flesh; is forbidden by the restriction of the Sages (Chullin 91a). Every last trace of these nerves must be 'porged' i.e. removed. Their fat is technically permitted, but because Jews are scrupulously pious, they treat it as forbidden; accordingly all the fat covering the sciatic nerve must be removed (Baraisa, *ibid.* 92b). Additionally, the six nerves which appear like strings must be removed as well as certain other veins.

Practically speaking, since 'porging' the hind quarters of the forbidden nerves is a laborious and costly task, kosher slaughterhouses in the United States usually sell the hind quarters of kosher slaughtered animals to non-kosher butchers,

and not for kosher trade. In Israel, however, where meat is more expensive, expert butchers purge the hind quarters.

The pertinent *halachos* regarding this prohibition are treated in *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 865.]

על כף הירך — On the hip socket.

As explained in Rashi's *comm.* to the term כף הירך, lit. *spoon of the thigh*, in verse 26, the hip socket is so called since the muscle structure over the thigh bone is convex like the ladle [spoon] of a pot.

Accordingly, the inclusion of this description prohibiting only the displaced nerve *on the spoon of the thigh* is interpreted by the Sages [Chullin 89b] to include only the displaced nerve in animals, since their hip structure fits this description. Fowl, however, are excluded from this prohibition since the muscle structure of their hip sockets are not convex, like a spoon, but lay flat against the body [*ibid.* 96a].

Further, the *Talmudic Sage* Shmuel [*ibid.*] derives the ruling that *Scripturally* only that part of the nerve *which is on the hip socket* [i.e. only the part of the nerve

and remarks on this point:

Be aware of a fundamental concept that whatever acts we do, or refrain from doing, are the result of God having commanded us concerning them through Moses our Teacher, and not because God had previously related them to any prophets preceding him ... For example, we abstain from eating the displaced sinew on the hip socket not because we intend to observe the prohibition that was laid on our father Jacob, but because our intention is to observe the *mitzvah* that was given to Moses our Teacher ... See what the Sages had proclaimed: 613 commandments were conveyed to Moses at Sinai [Makkos 23b], this being among the commandments.

[Cf. similar citation regarding the prohibition of eating limbs torn from living animals in footnote to 9:4 (p. 287); and regarding circumcision in *comm.* to 17:9 (p. 568).]

socket to this day, because he struck Jacob's hip-socket on the displaced sinew.

¹ Jacob raised his eyes and saw — Behold Esau was coming, accompanied by four hundred men. So

which runs in these convex shaped muscles at the proximal end of the thigh] is forbidden. [See RaMA, *Yoreh Deah* 100:1].

Though Jacob was wounded on only one of his hips — presumably the right one — the prohibition applies to the sinews of *both* hips (cf. Rabbinic controversy in *Chullin* 89b and *Midrash*).

הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה — *To this day.*

This day does not refer to the time when the prohibition was recorded, but to the time it is read: *as long as this will be read, accordingly, forever.* Similarly, it is writ-

ten of Moses' grave [*Deut.* 34:6]: *And no one knows his burial place until this day*, meaning that it will never be known (*R' Hirsch*).

[Cf. עַד הַיּוֹם in 19:37, and comm. to עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה in 26:34.]

— כִּי נָגַע בְּחִיָּתָא יַעֲקֹב בְּגִיד הַנֶּשֶׂה — *Because he* [i.e., the angel] *struck* (or: *gripped*; see above) *Jacob's hip socket on the displaced sinew.*

[I.e., it is in remembrance of that incident that we refrain from eating the aforementioned forbidden nerves. See *comm.* to לָבוֹן in the beginning of this verse for additional insights.]¹¹

XXXIII

1. The encounter between Jacob and Esau.

וַיֵּשָׂא יַעֲקֹב עֵינָיו — [And] *Jacob raised his eyes.*

[A common Biblical expression meaning *looked about* — in this

case, in anticipation of Esau's arrival.]

וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה עֹשׂוֹ בָּא וְעִמּוֹ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ — *And [he] saw — Behold Esau was coming, accompanied by [lit. and with him] four hundred men.*

1. The *Sefer HaChinuch* notes that 'at the root of this mitzvah lies the assurance that even though exiled Israel will endure affliction and persecution at the hands of Esau's descendants, it will survive. Israel's progeny and name will endure, and Messiah will redeem it from the hand of its oppressor. The reminder contained in the prohibition against eating the displaced sinew will eternally bolster Israel's faith and righteousness.

R' Hirsch derives הנָּשָׂה from the root נָשָׂה, *creditor*, one who is beholden to someone else. Accordingly, *renders it as sinew of submission*, and perceives in it the idea that one must submit to the power of someone else. Jacob was taught that although Esau could hinder and keep him from total independence, Esau would not be able to defeat him totally and prevent him from 'walking' through history.

For although Jacob's ability to stride forward was hampered, the thigh and its sinew were not *severed*, they were only injured. Even the wounds Esau *can* inflict upon Israel do not last forever.

By the commandment not to eat the sinew, Israel is reminded that Jacob stood almost alone against Esau's army of four hundred — yet he survived with only a minor injury. This was possible because of only one factor — God's help. Thus it stands as an eternal lesson not to feel hopeless in the face of Esau's power.

ויושלח לגביר ב השפחות: וישם את השפחות ואת ילדיהן ראשנה ואת לאה וילדיה אחרנים ואת רחל ואת יוסף אחרנים: והוא עבר לפניהם וישתחו ארצה שבע פעמים ער-גשתו ער-אחיו: וירץ עשו

[In the Hebrew the collective singular term *man* is used.]

Apparently, the gift had not appeased him (*Sforno*).

ניחץ את הילדים על-לאה ועל-רחל — So [lit. and] he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two handmaids [lit. upon Leah, and upon Rachel and upon the two handmaids.]

[Jacob did not want to rely on a miracle, and so took every possible precaution. This arrangement of his wives and children is apparently different from his division of his people and cattle in 32:7,8.]

Jacob's reasoning in dividing the children among their own mothers was that a mother naturally has the greatest love for her own children, and would exert herself to the utmost to save them. Should this be impossible she would cry and beg for God's mercy on their behalf (*Radak*).

From Jacob's course of action, we learn that despite our total confidence in God's promises, we still must do everything possible on our own behalf (*R' Hirsch*).

2. וישם את השפחות ואת ילדיהן ראשנה — [And] he put the handmaids and their children first.

The implication is not that he was actually willing to sacrifice Bilhah, Zilpah and their sons; he placed

them first in his prayers, as he was less secure regarding their safety than he was regarding that of Rachel and Leah (*Targum Yonasan; Sifsei Kohen*).

— Leah and her children next [lit. behind].

In contrast with ראשונים, first, the word אחרנים is usually interpreted last. However, as our verse makes evident, the word can also be used in the relative sense of next in sequence rather than as the absolute last (*Tosefos Yom Tov, Demai 7:3*).

That is, the term is relative. Compared with the first, these are last, but there still might be others who will come later. Cf. Exodus 4:8: If they will not heed the first sign, then they will believe the later sign (האחרון); and if they will not believe even these two signs, then you shall take ... etc. Here, too, אחרן does not necessarily mean the last one. ... Furthermore, it is interesting that *Tosefos Yom Tov* did not cite the specific *Gemara* in *Nazir 21a* where אחרן is perceived as the intermediate one (*Torah Temimah*).

— And Rachel and Joseph last.

The more precious and beloved, the farther back they were placed [*Rashi; Ibn Ezra*].

Jacob's hope was that at worst Esau's anger would be assuaged with the massacre of those in front, and he would spare those in the rear (*Radak*).

3. — Then [lit.

he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two handmaids. ² He put the handmaids and their children first, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. ³ Then he himself went on ahead of them and bowed earthward seven times as he approached his brother.

and] he himself went on ahead of them [lit. *passed before them*].⁽¹⁾

Saying, 'Should that wicked man intend to attack, let him fight me first!' (*Rashi*).

This is an example of a father's love for his children — should Esau not accept his conciliation, Jacob himself would bear the brunt of the attack so the children might be spared (*Radak*). [Cf. *Sifsei Kohen* above.]

וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים — And [he] bowed earthward seven times.

— In accordance with the verse [Prov. 24:16]: A righteous man falls seven times, but rises up again (*Radak*).

Jacob was quite justified in doing this. Esau was his older brother, and it was incumbent upon Jacob to give

him filial-like honor (*Rambam*, *comm. to Esther* 3:2).⁽²⁾

The number 'seven' is constantly perceived by the commentators as having great kabbalistic connotations. The *Midrash* interprets 'seven' in this case as indicating *countless times*: R' Chaninah said, Jacob did not cease prostrating himself until the *מִקְרָא הָרִין*, *God's Aspect of Strict Judgment* gave way to His *הַרְחֵמִים*, *Aspect of Mercy*.

Similarly, see R' Bachya to Lev. 26:26 that 'seven' is often to be taken in the figurative sense meaning 'many'.

The *Zohar* suggests that the subject of *He Himself went on ahead of them* is the Divine Presence which preceded Jacob and guarded him. It was accordingly not to Esau that Jacob bowed down until he approached his brother, but to the Holy One, Blessed be He, Who passed before him. Esau, however,

1. The *halachah* is that for all precepts a benediction is recited *לפני*, *before* the precepts are performed. Where is it implied that the word *עובר* (lit. *passed*) denotes priority?

— Abaye cites our verse where *עָבַר* is understood in the sense of *passed before*, i.e. preceded (*Pesachim* 7b).

[The *Rishonim* further qualify this to mean *immediately preceding*, for performance of a precept must follow its blessing with no delay.]

2. When Mordechai, claiming Jews do not bow, refused to prostrate himself in obeisance to Haman (*Esther* 3:2), he was reminded that Jacob prostrated himself before Esau.

'Yes', Mordechai replied. 'But Benjamin was not yet born and did not bow down and I am a Benjaminite [ibid. 2:5], a descendant of Benjamin. Therefore, just as my ancestor did not prostrate himself, I too will not bow down' (*Midrash Aggadah Esther* 3; *Torah Sheleimah* 814).

[The commentators similarly observe that Saul — a descendant of Benjamin — rather than someone else from the 'royal' tribe of Judah (see 49:10), was chosen as the first king of Israel. Upon this first king was to fall the obligation to destroy Amalek, Esau's descendants. Judah, as we shall see in v. 7, was among those who prostrated themselves to Esau. Only Benjamin, of all the tribes, was spared from witnessing this capitulation, and only a descendant of his could be called upon, in good conscience, to obliterate Esau's seed.]

Cf. also *Sifre*, *Deut.* 33:12: 'The Temple in Jerusalem was erected in the territory of Benjamin, for of the twelve sons, he alone did not participate in bowing down before the wicked Esau.'

וישלח לגה ה וישקהו ויבכו: וישא את-עיניו וירא את-הנשים ואת-הילדים ויאמר מי-לקראתו ויחבקהו ויפל על-צוארו

thought that Jacob was bowing down to him in great humility; hence his warm response. [See Overview.]

עד-גשתו עד-אחי — As [lit. until or while] he approached [unto] his brother.

I.e., while he approached Esau, he kept bowing. עד, until, in Scripture, often has the sense of עד, while. Cf. Job 1:18 and Shir Ha-Shirim 1:12 (HaKsav V'HaKabal-lah).

4. [Finally, the preliminaries are over and Jacob confronts Esau not knowing whether the result will be bloody battle or brotherly reconciliation.]

[And] ויכץ עשו לקראתו ויחבקהו Esau ran toward him, [and he] embraced him.

Esau's compassion was aroused at the sight of Jacob's numerous prostrations to him (Rashi from Midrash).¹¹

Esau thought that Jacob, by his many obeisances, was recognizing his birthright and superiority [see comm. to 32:5]. With this he was comforted; for men's hearts belong to God Who directs them wherever He desires (Ramban to 32:8).

[And] fell על-צוארו וישקהו upon his neck, and [he] kissed him.

In Torah Scrolls, the word וישקהו, and he kissed him, is dotted over each letter. Midrashically, this intimates that the word calls for a

special exposition since dotting is one of the methods by which the Torah calls attention to recondite allusions contained within a word [see for example אלו in 18:9, page 640.]

Rashi notes that the opinions of the Sages in Sifre [B'haalosecha] differ as to the significance of these dots. Some maintain that it indicates that Esau did not kiss him wholeheartedly. However, R' Shimon bar Yochai maintains that although: הִלְכָהּ הָיָא בְּדִוּעַ שְׂעוֹ שׁוֹנֵא לְיַעֲקֹב, It is a well-known tradition that Esau hates Jacob, but at that moment Esau's mercy was aroused and he kissed Jacob with genuine feeling.

The former opinion cited by Rashi is also expressed in the Midrash:

Said R' Yannai to R' Shimon: If Esau's kiss was sincere why is the word dotted at all? [Left undotted the word would be taken at face value as being sincere; since it is dotted, there must be a special significance to the word.] Rather, the dots signify that Esau's intention was not to kiss Jacob but to bite him! But Jacob's neck became firm as marble and Esau's teeth were blunted. The following phrase, and they wept, accordingly means that both wept — Jacob one wept on account of his hardened neck [which caused him pain (Sechel Tov)], and Esau on account of his teeth.

Cf. also Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer according to which the dots signify that the word is to be read אָדָּא if it suggested Esau's intent: ויִשְׁכְּחוּ, and he bit him!

The Zohar similarly invokes Proverbs 27:6: But the kisses of an enemy are deceptive. This is usually applied to Balaam who blessed Israel, but did so

1. The reason Esau's rage was mitigated was because his guardian angel, too, had already yielded to Jacob, and so Esau was forced to follow suit.

Everything in this world depends upon the Upper Realm, and when Esau and Jacob were reconciled previously in the Supernal Realm they were also reconciled below (Zohar).

⁴ Esau ran toward him, embraced him, fell upon his neck and kissed him. Then they wept. ⁵ He raised his eyes and saw the women and children, and he asked, "Who are these to you?"

against his will. However, Esau provides another example of this. It is advisable to be more wary of the hypocritical advances and seductive ruses of an enemy than of his overt threats or direct attacks. Jacob was on his guard.

[R' Shimon bar Yochai cited by Rashi apparently maintains that the dots point to the *unusual sincerity* in the kiss of an Esau.]

Ibn Ezra asserts that in the simple sense of the narrative Esau's actions were sincere. He cites the similar weeping of Joseph and his brothers [below 45:15] when they reunited. *Ralbag* interprets similarly that Esau was so moved by the abundance of Jacob's gifts and prostrations that he flung himself upon Jacob's neck in warm embrace as is usual for brothers who had not seen one another for many years.

ויכבו — Then [lit. and] they wept.

Both wept. This informs us that at that moment Jacob, too, felt love for Esau (*Haamek Davar*).¹¹

Compare the touching reunion of Joseph and his brothers where there was also much weeping [45:15]; that of Jacob and Joseph [46:29]; and that of Moses and Aaron [Exodus 4:27] (*Ralbag*).

That they wept illustrates how Esau was overcome by pure humane feelings. Kisses can be false, but not tears. One cannot cry unless

he is genuinely moved, for tears flow from the innermost feelings. Esau's kiss accompanied by tears proved that he, too, was a descendant of Abraham (*R' Hirsch*).

— According to the *Zohar* which views Esau as *insincere*: Jacob wept for fear that he might not escape his brother's onslaught. Esau wept because his father was still alive, so that he was unable to do any harm to Jacob.

— Jacob's weeping was stimulated by memories of his father's house (*Midrash HaGadol*).

וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת הַנָּשִׁים וְאֶת הַיְלָדִים — [And] he [=Esau] raised his eyes and saw the women and children.

They had been standing at a distance to watch how Jacob would fare (*Haamek Davar*).

Even in times of stress the wicked are moved by their own evil inclination [for even now Esau noticed the women] (*Midrash HaBiur* cited by *Torah Sheleimah*).

מִיֵּאֱלָה לָּךְ — Who are these [referring to both the women and children (*Ramban*)] to you?

The expression is clearly idiomatic:

— Who are these to be yours? I.e., how are these yours? (*Rashi*); are

1. This, too, portends an allusion to the future relationship between Jacob's descendants and Esau's. So has it been in all ages: whenever Esau's descendants have been inspired by a spirit of purity to acknowledge Israel's spiritual ascendancy, Israel responded with love and brotherhood. Thus we note the warm and intimate friendship that existed between Rabbi Yehudah the Prince, redactor of the *Mishnah*, and Antoninus, the Roman Emperor (*Haamek Davar*).

[Thus, it is not Esau's weeping that the *N'tziv*, author of *Haamek Davar*, finds impressive, but the weeping of Jacob, who, in spite of all that he had suffered at the hand of his brother, was ready to let bygones be bygones, in return for the smallest gesture of friendship.]

וישלח אֵלָה לָךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הַיְלָדִים אֲשֶׁר־חָנָן
 לַגִּזְרָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ: וַתִּגָּשׁן הַשִּׁפְחוֹת
 רַבִּיעִי הִנֵּה וַיִּלְדִּיהֶן וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶיִן: וַתִּגָּשׁ גַּם־לֵאָה
 וַיִּלְדֶּיהָ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ וְאַחֵר נִגְשׁ יוֹסֵף וְרָחֵל
 וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ: וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לָךְ כָּל־הַמִּכְנָה הַזֶּה

they your children or your servants? (*Sforno*).

— *Who are these with you? Or: Who are these? Are they yours? (Ibn Ezra).*

Tosefos HaRosh renders: *Who — these are yours? I.e., do they all belong to you?*

— הַיְלָדִים אֲשֶׁר־חָנָן אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ
 [They are] the children whom God has graciously given your servant.

— Though Esau had asked about the women also, Jacob delicately answered only about the children. Esau understood from his answer that the women were his wives, the mothers of the children (*Ramban*).

Esau inquired about the women because he wanted to marry them himself. But when Jacob answered about the children, Esau understood that these women were their mothers (*Haamek Davar*).

The translation of חָנָן, lit. *has been gracious* as meaning *has [graciously] given* follows *Ibn Ezra* and *Ibn Janach* [*Shorashim*: חָנָן] who cites an analogous usage in *Judges* 21:22: חָנְנוּ אוֹתָם, *give them to us* [see *Radak* ad loc.].

Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:54 notes that חָנָן, *graciousness*, connotes a gift to someone who has no claim to it. For this reason, too, since God brings everything into existence and nourishes beings that have no claim on Him, He is called חָנּוּן, *Gracious*.

6. וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶיִן — *And [they] bowed down.*

[Although the handmaids came forward with their children, the verb *bowed down* is in third person feminine plural — suggesting that

only the mothers bowed down. Apparently, their children did not bow]:

As sons of handmaids, Esau would consider them to be of inferior status, and would not even feel honored by their bowing. Alternatively, the sons only *came forward* but refused to *bow* with their mothers. The children reasoned that handmaids could properly bow, but it would be improper for sons of Jacob to do so [comp. action of Jacob and Leah's children, further] (*Chizkuni*).

[*Chizkuni's* second comment, however, does not explain how these children could consider it beneath their dignity to bow down when they had just witnessed Jacob himself bowing down seven times! Furthermore, the inference from the footnote to v. 3 is that all the children bowed — except Benjamin who was as-yet unborn.]

7. וַתִּגָּשׁ גַּם־לֵאָה וַיִּלְדֶּיהָ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ —
 [And] Leah, too, came forward [lit. *approached*] with her children and they bowed down.

Here, as well as in the next stich, *bowed down* is in masculine plural encompassing both the mothers and children, for in this case *even the children bowed*. [In Hebrew the masculine plural is used when the collective subject comprises males and females.]

These were the sons of the primary wives, women of standing and aristocracy [as opposed to the handmaids]. When they saw their mothers bow, they followed suit (*Chizkuni*).

He answered, 'The children whom God has graciously given your servant.'

⁶ Then the handmaids came forward — they and their children — and they bowed down. ⁷ Leah, too, came forward with her children and they bowed down; and afterwards, Joseph and Rachel came forward and bowed down.

⁸ And he asked, 'What did you intend by that whole camp that I met?'

ואחר נגש יוסף ורחל וישתחוו — And afterwards, Joseph and Rachel came forward [lit. approached] and [they] bowed down.

In the other groups, the mothers preceded the children; but here it was the reverse: Joseph went in front of his mother because knowing how beautiful she was, he was afraid that the wicked Esau might fix his gaze on her [and desire her]. He therefore stood in front of her and shielded her from Esau's gaze. In reward for this, Joseph merited the blessing associated with the words *עלי עין*, lit. *to the eye* [49:22; see *Rashi* there for an explanation of this allusion, and for a slightly different version of the *Midrash*] (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).

Why then did Jacob not conceal Rachel from Esau as he did Dinah [above 32:22]? — Possibly Jacob was convinced that a grandson of Abraham would not abduct a married woman. However, Joseph wanted to take every possible precaution (*Chizkuni*; *Abarbanel*).

According to the literal sense advanced by *Radak*, Joseph was still a child, and Rachel tenderly carried him in her arms in front of her. Therefore he is mentioned first. [Joseph was about six years old at the time (see *comm.* to v. 13 below), but it must be remembered that

unlike the other wives who had several children, Joseph was Rachel's only child.]

8. Esau now inquires about Jacob's intent in sending the immense tribute:

מי לך כל-המקנה הזה אשר פגשתי — What did you intend by that whole camp that I met?

The Hebrew literally means: *Whom to you is all that camp that I met?* Our translation of the *sense* of the passage follows *Rashi* who explains it to imply, *why did you need it?* [i.e., what was your purpose in sending the gifts to me?]

Rashi continues that in the literal sense [since *מי*, *who*, must refer to a person (*Mizrachi*)], the implied subject here is the leaders of the droves: *Who are your (drove leaders) that I have met?*

However, as is self-evident from Jacob's reply that the gift was to gain favor in my lord's eyes, Esau's question must mean: *Why did you go to the trouble of sending me your whole camp?* And though the word *מי* literally means *who* and must refer to a person, Esau had already learned from the leaders of the droves to *whom* they belonged and that the gifts were for *him*. Accordingly, his question could only refer to Jacob's motives (*Maskil l'David*).

— Unlike most commentators (*Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*) who insist that *מי*, *who*, must refer to a person, *Ibn Janach*, explains that *מי* could

1. *Rashi* proceeds to cite the Midrashic explanation that Esau's question refers to 'camps' of angels who met and attacked him and his men. The angels asked the men 'Who are you?' 'We are in the service of Esau,' came the reply, and the angels continued their attack.

Similarly, the angels took no notice when the men exclaimed to the angels, 'Leave him, he is

וּשְׁלַח לַגִּטִּי
ט אֲדֹנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר עָשׂוּ יִשְׁלִי רֶב אַחִי יְהִי לִךְ
י אֲשֶׁר-לָךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-נָא אִם-נָא
מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְלָקַחְתָּ מִנִּחְתִּי מִיָּדִי
כִּי עַל-כֵּן רָאִיתִי פָנֶיךָ כְּרָאת פָּנַי אֱלֹהִים

also take the sense of *מה, what, or how*, as in *Ruth 3:16: מי את בתי, How do things stand with you, my daughter?* [Thus, in our verse the sense would be: 'What is your intent in having sent this extravagant gift?']

Ramban notes that it is not entirely clear whether or not the drove leaders had been permitted to deliver to Esau the message of 32:8-21. Perhaps he had refused to see them, in which case his question here was sincere for he had never learned the origin of the tribute. Or, perhaps he *had* been told, either by the leaders or by members of his own camp, in which case his question was rhetorical. Nevertheless, *Ramban* maintains that the intent of the question is: *מי זה לך=לך מי זה, Who is it to you, i.e., Whom do you consider important enough for such an immense tribute?*

Ralbag perceives the sense to be: Who do you think is able to reciprocate your generosity in return for such a valuable gift?

Sforno assumes that Esau knew that the gift was meant for him. The question meant: The camp whom I met who

told me that they were 'a tribute sent to lord Esau' — Did you send me this gift as a mark of honor, or as an act of kindness thinking that I might be in need of it?

לַמְצֵאתִי בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי — [It was] to gain favor in my lord's eyes.

[i.e., to appease you and become reconciled with you (following *Rashi's* exegesis).]

Following *Ramban's* interpretation of the question, the sense of the reply is: 'In my opinion *you* are the superior and lord.'

Following *Ralbag's* interpretation: 'It was to *you* that I sent this gift. I expect nothing in return' (*Ralbag*).

[Following *Sforno*, Jacob's intent was: I sent you this gift as a mark of honor, to gain your grace.]

[Comp. *comm.* to this phrase in 32:6.]

9. יֵשׁ לִי רֵב — I have plenty.^[1]

— I have no need for your gifts (*Radak*).

a son of Isaac! Nor did the angels release Esau when the men protested that their victim was a grandson of Abraham.

But when they exclaimed, 'He is Jacob's brother!', they said 'If so, you are of with us.'

[This, the *Midrash* concludes, was Esau's intent in asking Jacob who were the camp of angels which he had met (פְּגָשְׁתִּי, connoting *meet in battle*). Therefore Jacob answered, 'To gain favor in my lord's eyes,' i.e., 'I sent them to propitiate, not to beat you.']

1. *R' Hoshaya* related: An elderly scholar once told me, 'I will teach you Midrashic interpretation, but whenever you repeat it, you must say it in my name. Some day Esau will return to Jacob everything he has ever taken from him. As Scripture says [*Psalms 72:10*]: The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall return a tribute. Observe that it says, shall return a tribute, and not, shall bring a tribute.'

I said to the elderly scholar, 'That is indeed a good thought, and I shall repeat it in your name.'

The scholar went on, 'If Esau will return the gift that Jacob willingly gave him, and even urged him to accept though he was reluctant to accept and said, "I have enough" — how much more will Esau return what he has stolen from Israel by force!' At that moment I uhanked him sincerely (*Tanchuma Yashan*).

He answered, 'To gain favor in my lord's eyes.'

⁹ Esau said, 'I have plenty. My brother, let what you have remain yours.'

¹⁰ But Jacob said, 'No, I beg of you! If I have after all found favor in your eyes, then accept my tribute from me, inasmuch as I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of a Divine being, and you were

[— Your gift, though generous, is unnecessary.]

Note Esau's haughtiness. Jacob constantly attributes his welfare to God: *The children whom God has graciously given your servant* [v. 5]; ... *Inasmuch as God has been gracious to me* [v. 11]. You will not find Esau ever invoking God's name (*R' Bachya*; comp. *comm.* to 27:21 s.v. *גִּשְׁחָנָא*).

[See footnote to 32:6 and Rashi to v. 11 s.v. *יִשְׁלִיכֵל*.]

אחי יהי לך אשר לך — *My brother, let what you have remain yours* [lit. *let there be to you what is yours.*]

Since you are my brother, you need not honor me with lavish gifts (*Sforno*).

In effect, by this statement Esau acquiesced to Jacob's possession of Isaac's blessing (*Rashi*).

¹⁰ אֵלֶיךָ — *No, I beg of you!*

Do not, I beg you, say such a thing to me (*Rashi*). [I.e., 'hat you have plenty and do not desire my gift. — Jacob referred only to the gift! He was surely not begging Esau to relinquish his acquiescence to Isaac's blessing (*Maharshal*).]

אֵינִי מֵצָאִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ — *If I have after all [lit. now] found favor in your eyes.*

— I.e., if you are now prepared to be well disposed toward me (*Malbim*).

וְלָקַחְתָּ מִנְחָתִי מִיָּדִי — *Then accept [lit. and you shall take] my tribute from me* [lit. *from my hand*].

— Then forgive me for having sent my tribute to you through servants, which certainly does not reflect my esteem for you. Now accept my gift from my hand — for I hereby give it to you personally (*Malbim*).

Jacob begs him to accept the gift as proof of his, Esau's, friendship toward him (*Ralbag*).

כִּי עָלֶיךָ רָאִיתִי פְנֵי כְּרָאֵת פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים — *Inasmuch as* [lit. *for therefore*] *I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of a Divine being.*

I.e., [If I have found favor in your eyes] it is entirely appropriate that you accept my gift, inasmuch as the sight of your face is as esteemed to me as seeing the face of your guardian angel whom I saw. Mention of the angel was calculated to instill fear in Esau so that he would conclude that if Jacob could survive seeing an angel, Esau would certainly be unable to prevail over him (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).

Rashi's interpretation is in consonance with his general interpretation of the idiomatic expression *כִּי עָלֶיךָ*. See specifically his *comm.* to 18:5. Accordingly, the sense of our verse is: 'If you view me at all favorably, then please accept my gift *for* — it is entirely appropriate that you do so [or according to his exegesis in 18:8: *for*, I ask you this only] — *עַל כֵּן*, inasmuch as I have seen your face which is as esteemed to me as see-

וישלח לג'א"יב יא ונתרצני: קחנא את-ברכתי אשר הבאת
לך כִּי־חַנְנִי אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יֵשְׁלִי־כָל
יב ויפְצֶרְבוּ וַיִּקַּח: וַיֹּאמֶר נִסְעָה וּנְלַכָּה

ing the face of your guardian angel. Furthermore, as the verse concludes, you should accept my gift since ותרצני, *you have been appeased by me* (Mizrachi).

[See also R' Hirsch's comm. to 18:5, the elliptical intent of which is applicable here too: ... 'Please accept my gift, (not because you are in need of it) but inasmuch as I have seen, etc.']

Sforno renders: Accept it because it is customary to bring a tribute to an honored man.

This follows the *Midrash* which perceives the sense to be: Accept my gift since *I have seen your face* ... and just as in respect to the face of God it is written [Exodus 23:15]: *None shall appear before My face empty handed*, so in respect to you: *None may appear before your face empty handed* (Malbim renders similarly).

The Talmudic Sage, Resh Lakish [Sotah 41b] cites Jacob's comparison of seeing Esau to the esteem of seeing a Divine being as Scriptural proof that one may flatter the wicked in This World.]

That the word אלהים in our verse is not sacred and does not refer to God [but to an angel or important personage] is stated in *Soferim* 4.

וְתִרְצֵנִי — And [since] you were appeased by me.

— I.e., and a further reason you should accept my present is: ותרצני, you were amenable to forgive my offense (Rashi).

Rashi continues that whenever the root verb רצה [or the noun רצון] occurs in Scripture it denotes *appeasement*. Cf. Lev. 22:20 יהיה לכם רצון, *It shall not be conciliatory for you* — for the purpose of the sacrifices is to appease and conciliate. Similarly, Proverbs 10:32: שפתם צדיק ידעון רצון, *The lips of the righteous know appeasement* — they know how to appease and conciliate.

[Cf. the expression in *Psalms* 19:15 יהיו לרצון אמרי פי, which according to Rashi should be rendered: *may my utterances be conciliatory* — and bring forgiveness. Thus, in our verse ותרצני properly means: *You became appeased or reconciled by me.*]

Ramban differs on the meaning of ותרצני. He maintains that [it is not an allusion to forgiveness for iniquity as Rashi suggests, because] it would have been inadvisable for Jacob to recall past grievances. Rather he maintains that רצה connotes *desire and pleasure* in a matter, and he cites verses where it connotes *favorable acceptance*. Accordingly he interprets that in our context Jacob says ... *And you would indicate your pleasure with me by accepting my present*, just as God shows His pleasure in those who fear Him (את יראיו) by accepting their offerings [see *Psalms* 147:11].

11. קחנא את־ברכתי. — Please accept my gift [lit. blessing].

The translation of ברכתי [lit. my blessing] as my gift follows Rashi who explains the term to connote a gift given as a greeting upon seeing someone after a lapse of time. The term *blessing* used in instances of meeting someone, such as below 47:7: *And Jacob 'blessed' Pharaoh* has the sense of *greeted*; in Old French: *saluer* [=salute]. Here, too, the connotation of my blessing is *mon salut* (French), my greeting [the figurative name given a gift which is meant as an expression of good wishes. Cf. *HaKsav V'HaKabbalah* to 32:30 s.v. ויברך אותו שם].

Radak cites the similar use of the term in *II Kings* 5:15.

— In Hebrew a *voluntary* gift is

33 *appeased by me.* ¹¹ Please accept my gift which was brought to you, inasmuch as God has been gracious to me and inasmuch as I have everything.' He urged him, and he accepted.

¹² And he said, 'Travel on and let us go — I will

termed a 'blessing' since one sends it from that with which God has blessed him [see *Deut.* 15:14]. However, an obligatory gift due a monarch is called *מַס, tax* (Ramban).

לָךְ אֲשֶׁר הָבֵאתָ — Which was been brought to you.

— By my servants (Radak).

— With no exertion on your part.

It was I who exerted myself to deliver it to you (Rashi from *Midrash*).

This is yet another reason you should accept my gift — I labored greatly to acquire it before it could be brought to you (Mizrachi).

בִּי־חֲנִי אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יִשְׁלִיכֶל — Inasmuch as God has been gracious to me, and inasmuch as I have everything.^[1]

I have everything; lit. I have all — everything that I require. Jacob spoke modestly, as if to say that whatever he has, constitutes everything he needs. Esau, however, spoke boastfully [v. 9]: וְשֶׁלִּי רַב, I have plenty — much, much, more than I need (Rashi).

— And though I gave you this extravagant gift, I will lack nothing since I have been endowed with God's blessing. My wealth will not be diminished, since God's blessing will make me rich [Proverbs 10:22] (Alshich; Malbim).

The first *ל* in חֲנִי has a *dagesh* because it serves the purpose of two *nun's*. The root of our word is חָנַן; and technically it should be conjugated חֲנִי. [That one of the *n's* is dropped and replaced with a *dagesh* is to avoid a triple consonant, for ease of pronunciation.] The suffix *ני* is not part of the root but serves as the accusative pronominal suffix — meaning *me*, as in וְכִי עָשִׂי (Rashi).

[For connotation of חָנַן as denoting unobligated graciousness, see Rambam cited end of v. 5.]

וַיִּפְצְרוּ בִּיָּקֹב — [And] he [Jacob] urged him, and he [Esau] accepted.

I.e., Jacob showered Esau with appeals until he accepted (Radak).

Although Esau appeared to have refused Jacob's gift, his hand had been outstretched all along to take it. [I.e., his refusal had been but a formal display of oriental courtesy; Esau throughout had every intention of accepting the gift] (*Midrash*).

Sefer HaYashar notes that in addition to the droves, Jacob also gave Esau gold, silver, and bdellium. Esau divided the cattle, giving half to his mercenaries and half to his sons. The silver, gold, and bdellium he put in the care of his son Eliphaz.

12. וַיֹּאמֶר נִסְעָה וְנֵלֶכָה — And he said, 'Travel on and let us go'.

Esau is speaking (Rashi). This is evident from the response in v. 13 where the expression my lord is

1. As noted in the *comm.* to 24:1 and 27:33, the word כל, *all*, has esoteric implications as one of the Attributes of God. The *Talmud*, *Bava Basra* 16b-17a notes that in connection with each of the Patriarchs, the Torah uses the term כל, *all*, everything, a word which implies perfection, a totally unflawed blessing. — With Abraham in 24:1: *HASHEM* had blessed Abraham *בְּכֹל*, with everything; with Isaac in 27:33: *I* partook *מִכָּל*, from everything; and with Jacob, our verse is cited. Kabbalistically, this teaches that in life they were given a taste of the World to

וישלח לג'יג'יד יג ואלכה לנגדה: ויאמר אליו אדני ידע
 בן-הילדים רבים והצאן והפקר עלות
 עלי ודפקום יום אחד ומתו כל-הצאן:
 יד יעבר-נא אדני לפני עבדו ואני אתנהלה
 לאטי לרגל המלאכה אשר-לפני ולרגל

used, an indication that the speaker must be Jacob (*Mizrachi*).

When the verbs הלך and נסע, *travel* and *go*, occur together, the sense of *travel* is rising up from a particular resting place, and *go* is the actual embarking on the journey. Thus, the intent of this suggestion is that they should immediately rise up and without delay set out on the journey (*Malbim*).

This follows *Onkelos* and *Rashi* who similarly interpret the passage. *Rashi* adds that נסע is the imperative = נסע, *travel on* [i.e. *rise up*] and *we will go*, the נ of נסע being part of the root [and not the future-tense prefix, in which case the word would mean *we shall travel on*]. Similar are סלח and שמע which are the imperative forms of סלח [the ו and ס of which are also part of the root word (*Mizrachi*)].

[As noted in the *comm.* to 27:19 s.v. ואכלה, the imperative verb form with a suffix ה (in this case ואלכה instead of נסע) (וילך) is used to reflect a connotation of *request* rather than a *command*.]

ואלכה לנגדה — [And] *I will proceed at your pace* [following *R' Hirsch*; literally: *And I will go alongside (or: opposite) you*].

— I.e., I will do you the favor of slowing down as much as is necessary to keep pace with your slow moving flocks and family. This is the meaning of לנגדה, *alongside of you* (*Rashi*).

13. [Anxious to part company as

quickly as possible, Jacob courteously declines Esau's offer.]

My lord knows [i.e., it is obvious to you (*Sechel Tov*)] that the children are tender.

— The oldest, Reuben, was only little more than twelve years old at the time (*Ibn Ezra*).

[Jacob was in Laban's house a total of 20 years (7+7+6). As noted in the *comm.* to 29:32, *Seder Olam* maintains that all the children except Benjamin were born during the second seven year period. If so, Reuben, the eldest was born in the eighth year of Jacob's service. The youngest, Joseph, was about six years old — hardly equal to rigorous travel.]

והצאן והפקר עלות עלי — And the nursing flock[s] and [the] herd[s] are upon me.

The younger animals, which are עלי, *upon me* — it is my responsibility to drive them slowly (*Rashi*).

[Thus, as the commentators on *Rashi* explain, the word עלות is not connected with עלי, but is an adjective modifying והצאן והפקר, as if the phrase read והצאן והפקר עלי, the suckling flocks and herds, upon me, stands by itself, the elliptic connotation being: *their welfare is upon me*, i.e., they are my responsibility.]

Rashi cites words of the same root in Scripture, e.g. *Lam. 2:11*: עולל ויונק, *babes and sucklings*; *Isaiah 65:20*: עול ימים, *an infant in years*; *1 Samuel 6:7*: פרות עלות, *milk cows*.

Come, that the Evil Incarnation had no dominion over them, that the Angel of Death had no dominion over them, and that their bodies remained intact after death.

[This, as noted in the *comm.* to *ArtScroll Bircas HaMazon*, is the intent of the blessing in Grace After Meals: 'The compassionate One! May He Bless ... us and all that is ours with everything, מכל from everything, כל, everything.]

proceed at your pace.'

¹³ But he said to him, 'My lord knows that the children are tender, and the nursing flocks and herds are upon me; if they will be driven hard for a single day, then, all the flocks will die. ¹⁴ Let my lord go ahead of his servant; I will make my way at my slow pace according to the gait of the drove before me and

The sense of the word as perceived by the commentators [see *Radak* to 49:15] is that it refers to infants who are entirely dependent upon their mothers [or, in our case, their shepherd].

[Following the cantillation, however, it would appear that *עָלוֹת עָלַי* is to be read as a unit, the sense of the passage being: and the flock and the herds *עָלוֹת עָלַי*, are dependent upon me — lit. take suck from me.]

וּדְפְקוֹם יוֹם אֶחָד — [And] if they will be driven [lit. and (if) they drive them] hard for a single day.

— And thus weary them on the journey by causing them to run (*Rashi*).

— Should we drive them hard in your honor so as to keep pace with you and not delay you excessively (*Sforno*).

Rashi explains that the verb *דְּפְקוֹם* means knock. Cf. *Song of Songs* 5:2: קוֹל דְּרוּדֵי דוֹפֵק, A sound! My beloved knocks. [It figuratively applies to whipping animals to make them run faster.]

וְנָמֹת כָּל-הָעֹצָאן — Then [lit. and] all the flocks will die.

From fatigue (*Rashi*).

Actually, Jacob's primary concern was for his frail children, but delicacy did not permit him to mention death explicitly in their case. 'A covenant is made with the lips' (*Moed Katan* 18a), and even an unintentional implication, much less an explicit statement, may contain a prognostication for the future. Such unintended prognostications often become fulfilled as if by prophecy (see footnote, p. 1165, and comm. to

31:32).] He did not want to say, 'Then they will die,' vaguely omitting the subject of his fear — because it would seem that the children were included by implication ...

It is possible that Jacob mentioned only the *עֹצָאן*, flocks, [the collective term for sheep, goats and other small ungulates] for it is they who would succumb to the fatigue. He omitted *בָּקָר*, herds of cattle because they might suffer injury, but would not die (*Ramban*).

Chizkuni suggests that the children were not mentioned because they traveled on camels and thus were not prone to the mortal danger of the tender sheep which traveled on foot.

14. וַיַּעֲבֵרֵנָּא אֶרְנִי לִפְנֵי עֲבָדוֹ — Let my lord go ahead [lit. before] of his servant.

— Do not prolong your journey; proceed at your usual speed though you will far outdistance me (*Rashi*).

[Thus *Rashi* clarifies that Jacob's intent was not that Esau should lead the way with him following close behind, but that Esau should proceed at his own pace, without taking account of Jacob (*Mizrachi*).]

וְאֵנִי אֶתְנַהֵלָה לְאִטִּי — [And] I will make my way at my slow pace.

— The word *לְאִטִּי* [slowness] like *נָחַת*, connotes ease, quietude, tranquility, gentleness. Cf. use in *Isaiah* 8:6; *II Sam.* 18:5. The *ל* אִטִּי is a

וישלח לג'טו-טו שְׁעִירָה: וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂוּ אֶצִּיגָהּ-נָא עִמָּךְ מִן-הָעַם אֲשֶׁר אֵתִי וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה טו אֲמַצְאֶחֶן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדָנִי: וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּיוֹם הַהוּא

root letter and not a prefix, so that the literal meaning is *I will lead on* לאט שלי, *at my own slow pace* (Rashi) [similarly Ibn Janach.]

Ibn Ezra in his primary comment perceives the י to be superfluous — [as in גִּבְּתָהּ=גִּבְּתִי (31:39)]— and that the passage means 'I will lead on לאט, slowly.'

The suffix הָהוּא is superfluous; it is the equivalent of אֲתֵנָּהּ, analogous with אָרְהָ=אָרְהָ (Rashi). [It also implies the more courteous form; see above v. 12, נִסְעָה.]

לְרִגְלֵי הַמִּלְאָכָה אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי — According to the gait of the drove [lit. work] [which is] before me.

Following Rashi: לְרִגְלֵי, according to the needs of the feet of הַמִּלְאָכָה, the drove, which is my duty [lit. my work or job] to lead; וּלְרִגְלֵי הַיְלָדִים, and according to the gait of the children.

Thus, Rashi interprets לְרִגְלֵי as ל, according to, the רגל, footstep requirements. מִלְאָכָה refers to the droves, since it is his work [i.e. duty] to lead them from place to place (Miztrachi).

Ibn Ezra renders לְרִגְלֵי, for the sake of (comp. מִלְאָכָתִי in 30:30) לְרִגְלֵי, the cattle who are the object of my occupation. He writes: 'It seems to me that מִלְאָכָה denotes whatever man can produce by his own power and province. Even property may be termed work, as in Exodus 22:7. The word מִלְאָךְ [emissary or angel] derives from this root since a מִלְאָךְ is the product of and under the

province of the dispatcher.' [Radak renders similarly.]

עַד אֲשֶׁר אָבָא אֶל-אֲדָנִי שְׁעִירָה — Until I come to [i.e., catch up with] my lord at [lit. to] Seir.

— It was not Jacob's intention to go as far as Seir, but only as far as Succoth. He named a place farther than his actual destination because he thought, 'If Esau intends to do me harm, let him wait until I come to him' [i.e., let him be complacent, thinking that he will yet have an opportunity to carry out his contemplated attack when I meet him again; I will, however, not give him that opportunity, and will detour earlier;] and he did not go.^[1] When, however, will he go? [i.e., since we do not find in all of Scripture that Jacob ever went to Seir, and he certainly did not intend to utter a blatant falsehood, when indeed did Jacob intend going there? (see Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah 2:1)] — He was alluding to the future, in the days of the Messiah, of which it is written [of Jacob's descendants (Obadiah 1:21)]: And saviors [i.e., the Judges of Israel] shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau [=Mount Seir]. There are many Aggadic interpretations on this Parshah (Rashi).^[2]

1. Avodah Zarah 25b gives this bit of advice: If a traveler is approached by a stranger and asked his destination, he should lengthen his journey [i.e., he should answer with a point further along the road than his actual destination. Thus, if the stranger is planning an ambush, he will set his trap in the wrong place, for the traveler will detour earlier (Rashi)] as our father Jacob did when confronted by the wicked Esau.

2. Esau said, 'Let us travel on and go — let us divide between us This World and Next.' Jacob answered, 'The children are frail — in performance of mitzvot. If I choose prosperity

וישלה לו בית ולמקנהו עשה סכת על-בן ועשו לדרך שעירה: ויעקב נסע סכתה לגיוז

found such favor in my lord's eyes? I.e., why am I worthy of such kindness on your part? (*Radak*).

Esau understood the implication that though Jacob acted in a friendly manner toward him *for the moment*, he had no desire to maintain a close *permanent* relationship with him or his people. For in truth, it is Jacob's destiny to dwell alone and secure, as we find further in 46:4 and *Deuteronomy* 33:8. This irritated Esau and he did not speak to Jacob again. However, he could not bring himself to harm him (*Haamek Davar*).

— Jacob's reply is a lesson for all generations not to associate overmuch with government officials. They draw no man next to them except for their own interest (*Tur*).

16. וישב ביום ההוא עשו לדרך שעירה — *So Esau started back* [lit. returned] that day on his way toward Seir.

— Esau returned alone; the four hundred men who had accompanied him deserted him one by one. For this they [i.e., their descendants] were rewarded in the days of David, when [*I Samuel* 30:17] David slew a camp of Amalekites [descendants of Esau] four hundred young men escaped (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).

Apparently there was a coolness between Jacob and Esau at the parting. It was not accompanied by the kissing which marked Jacob's departure from Laban [32:1]. Per-

ceiving this coolness, Jacob gave up any thought of going to Seir to receive more honor from Esau (*Haamek Davar*).

The Hebrew literally reads: *So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir*, which *Targum Yonasan* — followed by *Lekach Tov* — interprets to imply that a miracle was performed, and he made the journey in only one day so Jacob would be rid of him that much sooner.

R' Shmuel ben Chafni Gaon, in following the literal sense of the passage, maintains that the verse is informing us that all of the events in this narrative — the meeting and subsequent exchange between Jacob and Esau — took place in one day, and on that same day Esau set out on his return journey to Seir.

R' Hirsch perceives that the expression *לדרך*, on his way, is not quite clear. Perhaps it signifies that Esau returned to his old life style. This was the last time Jacob and Esau met, and henceforth their ways of life would separate. The brotherly affection of this meeting was but a portent of the ultimate relationship of the two nations in a far-off future.

17. Jacob in Succoth.

ויעקב נסע סכתה ויבן לו בית — *But Jacob journeyed to Succoth and built himself a house.*

— Either no city existed there and he had to build a house for himself and shelters for his cattle, or he may have built a large house with

he forgot to pay due attention to the lesson of this verse and took Romans along for company. They had hardly reached Acco when he was forced to sell his cloak to raise money for bribes.

Ramban concludes that the Rabbis attached special significance to this chapter because of the tradition that it was portentous of the future exile, and they perceived in this episode a guide to the nation's conduct under Edomite domination.

Thus, those who later had to conduct communal missions to the Roman rulers would first study this section to draw inspiration from the methods of the wise Patriarch — whom his descendants were to watch and emulate.

33 ¹⁶ So Esau started back that day on his way toward 16-17 Seir. ¹⁷ But Jacob journeyed to Succoth and built himself a house, and for his livestock he made

defense towers should Esau attack him (Ramban).

וּלְמִקְנֵהוּ עָשָׂה סֹכֶה — [And] for his livestock he made shelters [or: stalls; booths; Hebrew: succoth].

Rashi, following the traditional Rabbinic chronology in Megillah 17a and Seder Olam chapt. 2, mentions that Jacob spent eighteen months there: summer, winter and summer. This is exegeted from these three words of our verse: *Succoth* — implying a summer dwelling since it is customary in those warm climates to live outdoors in the summer with a booth-like shelter overhead as protection from the sun; a *house* — implying a winter home; and *succoth* implying a summer dwelling. Thus, two summers and one winter were spent there, a total of eighteen months in all (Mizrachi).⁽¹⁾

[Jacob then tarried another six months, offering sacrifices at Bethel. Thus the total length of his journey home was two years. See 35:7; Rashi to 28:9, and Chart B on p. 1173.]

The commentators differ as to exactly how this eighteen month period is exegetically

derived from our verse.

Mizrachi follows the opinion that it is based on the implication of the three references to dwelling places as noted above.

Gur Aryeh, too, holds that the exegesis derives the length of Jacob's stay from the allusion to shelters for three different seasons. Why should Jacob have named the place Succoth to commemorate the shelters he built for the animals, surely, reasonable men are more concerned with the conditions of people than of animals! That being the case, why didn't Jacob name the place to commemorate the houses he built for the people? Furthermore, since he named the place Succoth after the shelters, that fact that he so named it should have been given immediately after the first mention that he built animal shelters. According to the Talmudic exegesis, however, these questions are easily resolved. He used the name Succoth because shelters had to be put up twice, during the two separate summer seasons, while houses were built only once. He chose that name only after the second summer, when it became apparent that the prime activity of his stay had been the erection of the shelters.

Gur Aryeh adds further proof that Jacob must have remained in Succoth for a considerable period of time: When Simeon and Levi attacked the people of Shechem to free Dinah, they were described as *אִישׁ אֶחָד*, each man [34:25], a term implying that each had to be at least thirteen years of age. Since Reuben was only slightly over twelve when Jacob left Charan, Levi could not have been over eleven

1. Mizrachi questions, however, why Rashi has included this Midrashic interpretation here when according to the plain sense of the text the *house* and *shelters* were both made in the same season — the *house* for him and the *shelters* for his livestock.

As Rashi specifically mentions in his *comm.* to 3:8: 'Though our Teachers have collected many Midrashic interpretations in their appropriate places ... I, however, am concerned only with *פְּשׁוּטוֹ שֶׁל מִקְרָא*, the plain sense of Scripture, in a manner that is contextually appropriate' [cf. also below v. 20]. If so, why has he not followed the simple meaning here? And furthermore, though Midrashically the first mention of Succoth is exegetically interpreted, in the plain sense of *סֹכֶה* does not refer to the construction of shelters, but that he came to a place later named Succoth.

Kitzur Mizrachi answers that Rashi felt that a proper understanding of Jacob's subsequent history requires us to cite this Midrashic interpretation — even though it does not follow the literal intent of the text. This information is essential to the comprehension of the chronological calculation which equates the twenty-two year period Jacob stayed away from his parents to the similar period Joseph was in turn away from him, as Rashi notes in 37:34 [see also Haamek Davar].

וּשְׁלַח יי קָרָא שְׁמֵי-הַמָּקוֹם סְכוּת: וַיְבָא
 יַעֲקֹב שָׁלֵם עִיר שְׁכֵם אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן
 בְּבֹאוֹ מִפָּדָן אֶרֶם וַיַּחֲן אֶת-פָּנָיו הָעִיר:

and a half. For Levi to be thirteen when they left Succoth, an eighteen-month stay was imperative.

Maharsha to *Megillah* 17a submits that the Talmudic source of this interpretation indicates that the first mention of *Succoth* is not the catalyst for this exegetical interpretation, since that refers not to *shelters*, but to the name of the town. Rather, the time period is derived from the plural form סְכוּת, *shelters* — implying two summer seasons of shelter-dwelling, while *house* is in the singular, implying a single winter. *Maharsha* observes that although *Rashi* in *Chumash* seems to favor the interpretation as understood by *Mizrachi*, this interpretation avoids many difficulties otherwise inherent.

Haamek Davar suggests that Jacob did not make these shelters for his livestock, but for *himself*. The intent of the phrase וַיַּעַשׂ סְכוּת לְעֹשֶׂהוּ, *for his livestock he made shelters*, is that *because of his livestock* — i.e. because he felt that his livestock needed this long period of rest — he set up residence there and built סְכוּת, *shelters*, for himself and his family. The plural, as the Sages perceive it, denotes *two* summer seasons when shelters are needed. Although Jacob's intention in delaying his return home was focused on his concern for his livestock, he was nevertheless punished for the delay.

עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמֵי-הַמָּקוֹם סְכוּת: — *He therefore named the place Succoth.*

— Meaning *shelters*. [See *Gur Aryeh* above for the reason he named the place to commemorate the shelters rather than the houses.]

Or *HaChaim* suggests that the name commemorated the *shelters*, not the *house*, for this may have been the first time anyone had taken such trouble to preserve animals from the distress of sun and cold.

This site — which was later to become part of the territory of the tribe of Gad — was slightly north of Jabbok in the Transjordan in the kingdom of Sichon. See *Joshua* 13:27; *Judges* 8:5. [It is not to be confused with the Succoth in *Exodus* 12:37, an Egyptian town (*Kesses HaSofer*).] Conceivably, however, this was yet another Succoth [*I Kings* 7:46], and was nearer to Seir (*Ramban*; *Abarbanel*).

18. Jacob in Shechem.

[And] Jacob arrived intact. — וַיְבָא יַעֲקֹב שָׁלֵם

Literally, שָׁלֵם means *whole; complete; perfect; unimpaired*: The Torah thus intimates that he arrived intact in body — having been cured of his limp; intact financially — lacking nothing though he had showered a large gift upon Esau [for, as *Midrash Tanchuma* notes, God had replenished everything Jacob spent on that gift]; and intact in his learning — having forgotten nothing while in Laban's house (*Rashi* from *Shabbos* 33b).

— He arrived in peace [שָׁלוֹם=שָׁלֵם; *peace*] from his exile, with nothing adverse having happened to him (*Ibn Ezra*).

The sense is that Jacob now felt secure when he reached Shechem (*Ramban*; see below).

Jacob arrived שָׁלֵם, in total, harmonious *completeness* — physically, materially, morally, and spiritually. This is especially noteworthy in view of the moral dangers always present when a man must struggle strenuously to secure material independence (*R' Hirsch*).

¹⁸ Jacob arrived intact at the city of Shechem which is in the land of Canaan, upon arriving from Paddan Aram, and he encamped in view of the city. ¹⁹ He

עיר שכם אשר בארץ כנען — At the city of Shechem [which is] in the land of Canaan.

Jacob felt secure only when he reached Shechem because, as the Torah emphasizes, it was in Eretz Yisrael where he knew that Esau would not molest him since Isaac was nearby, because the inhabitants stood in awe of Isaac and would protect him, or because the merit of Eretz Yisrael would protect him. In contrast, during his stay in Succoth, Jacob felt no such security. As the Sages in the Midrash point out, as long as he lived in Succoth, Jacob kept sending extravagant gifts to Esau in Seir to appease him (Ramban).

[Shechem was an old Canaanite city. It was previously visited by Abraham when he entered Canaan (see *comm.* to 12:6). As we shall see from the tragic events that repeatedly occurred there, it was מוקדם מוקדם, a place predestined for misfortunes (cf. Rashi to 37:14).]

Rashbam maintains that שלם is not an adjective meaning intact, but the name of a locale: Jacob came to Shalem, the city where Shechem was chieftain. [I.e., Shechem was the head of a city called Shalem, to which Jacob now came. Most commentators disagree inasmuch as the only known city called Shalem was Jerusalem (see on 14:18), which certainly does not fit the above description as the 'city of Shechem'. Although R' Hoffmann prefers Rashi's interpretation that שלם here means intact, he notes that even today there is a village named Salaam somewhat north of Shechem.]

— Upon arriving [when he came] from Paddan Aram.

It is as one says, 'So and so has escaped from between the lion's teeth and arrived whole.' So here we are told מפקן ארם ... שלם ... ויבא, Jacob arrived intact [although he was coming] from Paddan Aram — from Laban, and from Esau who had encountered him on the way (Rashi).

[On Paddan Aram see above 25:20.]

— ויחן את פני העיר — And he encamped in view of the city.

It was Friday afternoon close to sundown. Jacob was therefore compelled to encamp before the city since there was no time left to enter the city, and he established תחומין, Sabbath limits, while it was yet day. [That is, he established a place where he would spend the Sabbath. ויחן is rendered: he established his חנינה, resting place). This permitted him to then go anywhere within a radius of 2,000 cubits from that spot on the Sabbath.] This proves that Jacob kept the Sabbath before it was given (Midrash; also cited in some editions of Rashi quoting Sheiltos d'Rav Achai Gaon).

According to Ramban [cited in next verse], Jacob encamped there intentionally, since he did not want to be merely a transient lodger in the city, but wanted to buy a piece of land on the outskirts of the city and thus establish a presence in the

וישלה יט ויקן את-חלקת השדה אשר נטה-שם
לגיט-כ אהלו מיד בני-חמור אבי שכם במאה
כ קשיטה: ויצב-שם מזבח ויקרא-לו אל

land on his own property [so great was his love of the Land].

Possibly, the city was small, and since Jacob was accompanied by a large entourage he did not want to inconvenience the residents. So he encamped on the outskirts of the city, on the site he planned to purchase (*Radak*).

Midrashically, ויקן is related to חן, grace, and פני העיר is a reference to the leading men of the city, [cf. *Midrash* to 41:56]: ... and he was gracious to the leaders of the city — he sent them gifts. This teaches that one must display gratitude to his host community.

Cf. *Shabbos* 33b: He was gracious toward the city — he minted coins; he set up market places [where he sold goods cheaply (*Midrash*)]; he provided public baths.

19. ויקן את חלקת השדה אשר נטה — שם אהלו — [And] he bought the parcel of land upon which he pitched his tent.

It was Jacob's intention not to be merely a transient lodger, but to establish an inalienable right to the land by means of purchase. That his first purchase was in Shechem was an allusion that this site would be the first one conquered by his family [34:28], almost three hundred years before the inhabitants of the land would be displaced by Israel as noted in the case of Abraham. [See footnote to 12:6 (p. 436)] (*Ramban*).

The Torah mentioned the purchase of this *parcel* [lit. *portion*] of land in order to inform us of the excellence of Eretz Yisrael. Whoever has a *portion* of it, is considered as

having a portion in the World to Come (*Ibn Ezra*).

The Sages proclaimed that one who comes to Eretz Yisrael with the means to do so must buy himself a portion in the land (*Midrash Ha-Gadol*).

Sforno connects this with the next verse: He bought the parcel of land ... and set up an altar there. He cites *Psalms* 137:4: How shall we sing HASHEM's praise on foreign soil?

Jacob wanted the altar he was about to erect to be on his own property, and not on land belonging to strangers (*HaKsav V'Ha Kabbalah*).

From — מיד בני חמור אבי שכם — [the hand of] the children of Chamor, Shechem's father.

Chamor was the chieftain of the city of Shechem [see 34:2]. As noted in the *comm.* to 12:6 according to *Ibn Ezra*, Chamor had named the city in honor of his son Shechem [cf. *Ramban* there].

Jacob bought the land from the children of Chamor rather than from Chamor himself. Perhaps the property had passed on and was now theirs. Chamor is referred to as Shechem's father, since Shechem was more honored and well known than his father [as specifically noted in 34:19].

Chamor was infirm, and his interests were handled by his sons, primarily Shechem (*Abarbanel*).

Hoffmann explains בני חמור as meaning the clansmen of Chamor.

bought the parcel of land upon which he pitched his tent from the children of Chamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred kesitahs. ²⁰ He set up an altar there

Some interpret the term *Shechem's father* as meaning: the chieftain [=city father] of the city of Shechem (*Ibn Caspi*).

בְּמֵאָה קְשִׁיטָה — For one hundred kesitahs.

The *kesitah* was the equivalent of a *me'ah* [=1/6 of a *dinar*=1/24 of a *shekel* (see *comm.* to *Numb.* 3:47)], both names being used interchangeably in the coastal towns [*Rosh Hashanah* 26b]. *Onkelos* renders it [as an adjective meaning] חֹרֶפֶן, *good ones*, i.e., *negotiable currency* — *recognized everywhere*, as in 23:16: עֵבֶר לְסָחָר (*Rashi*).

Among other interpretations of *kesitah* are *precious stones* (*Targum Yonasan*); and *sheep* (*Onkelos* as explained by *Midrash HaChofetz* since the Aramaic חֹרֶפֶן is the same word *Onkelos* uses to translate כְּשֹׁט, *sheep*). Both of these renderings, as well as the familiar interpretation, *coins*, are recorded in the *Midrash*.

[The Sages view this purchase as indicative of the unquestioning faith of the Patriarchs. See citation from *Sanhedrin* 111a in footnote to 28:13.]

The *Midrash* notes that this became the eventual site of Joseph's sepulchre. It is one of the three places where the gentiles cannot besmirch Israel by saying, 'You hold stolen property,' since, as

our verse tells us, Jacob bought it with uncontested currency. [See footnote, page 882.]

20. וַיִּצְבֵּשׂ מִזְבֵּחַ — [And] he set up an altar there.

Having arrived in safety, Jacob built an altar there in consonance with his twenty-two-year-old vow (*Alshich*).

However, Jacob erred in building his altar in Shechem. Although he had arrived in Canaan safe and sound, in fulfillment of every condition he had requested of God, he still did not fulfill his vow by proceeding directly to *Bethel*. Instead he took up residence in Shechem and set up an altar there, hoping thereby to cause the *Shechinah* to descend there. But Providence caused the incident with Dinah to happen in Shechem, so he would be forced to leave that place and keep his vow in *Bethel* (*Malbim*).

The verb וַיִּצְבֵּשׂ, *set up*, rather than וַיִּבֶן, *erected* or *built*, would imply that in this instance, it was an altar of a single stone (*Radak*).

According to *Lekach Tov*, 'erect' implies construction with stones of mortar; 'set up' denotes that the altar consisted of stones put together without mortar.^[1]

1. R' Hirsch perceives in this hybrid expression — וַיִּצְבֵּשׂ, implying a single-stone pillar in association with a multi-stone altar — a turning point in man's service to God. [See footnote to 28:18.]

The use of a single, natural stone upon which to serve God represents man's acknowledgement that all natural resources and abilities are given us by God. The construction of an altar from many stones implies that man utilizes and regulates his own activity to conform to God's will, and that man thereby shapes the universe. This latter form of service came into play when the Torah and the commandments were given. Jacob's arrival in the future land of the Torah represented the recognition that Israel's philosophy of service would undergo change.

וּשְׁלַח אֶלֶּהִי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וְנִתְצָא דִּינָה לְדָא חֲמִישִׁי בִּתְלָאָה אֲשֶׁר יִלְדָה לִיעֲקֹב לְרֵאוֹת

— וְנִקְרָא לוֹ אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל — And proclaimed it 'God is the God of Israel.'

[The Hebrew literally means: And he called it (or: to it, or: to himself): 'God God of Israel.']

— This does not mean that the altar was called 'God of Israel' [in the sense that one would think that the altar itself was endowed with Divinity (*Sefer HaZikaron*)]. Rather, Jacob intended that God's praise would be evoked at the mention of the altar's name. 'He Who is God — the Holy One, Blessed be He — is the God of me whose name is Israel'. We find a similar situation in the case of Moses who named the altar 'HASHEM Nissi' [Exodus 17:15]. He did not call the altar HASHEM [as if to imply that the altar itself was the Divinity (*Sefer HaZikaron*)] but that the altar's name was an expression of praise: 'HASHEM is my (Moses') banner'. [Comp. footnote on p. 1096] (Rashi).

Ramban quotes Rashi's interpretation with approval, and draws attention to similar names which are indicative of God's praises, such as *Zurriel* [=God is my Rock]; *Zurishaddai* [=the Almighty is my Rock]. These names do not imply that one is referring to that person as being God Who is his rock. Rather one who calls that name, thereby signifies that God is his Rock. Similarly *Immanuel* [=God is with us] ... and the names of angels — *Gavriel* [=God is my strength], *Michael* [=who is like God?] — which proclaim by their very names that power belongs to God and who is comparable to Him.

Ramban proceeds to cite Onkelos who renders: and he worshiped on it before God, the God of Israel. He then

suggests that it is alternatively possible that the passage means: And he called Him 'God, the God of Israel.'

Sforno interprets similarly: He invoked God in his prayers as God of Israel, in fulfillment of his vow in 28:21 employing his new name Israel.

This is in consonance with Chizkuni who additionally explains Rashi's intent that not everyone called the altar 'God is the God of Israel.' It was Jacob himself who referred to it by that designation. This is the intent of לוֹ וְנִקְרָא, 'he himself called.'

Rashi cites the Talmudic interpretation that the subject is God Who called Jacob אֵל, mighty. [Thus the verse would be rendered as if it read: וְנִקְרָא לוֹ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵל, And the God of Israel called him [Jacob] 'El' (Megillah 18a; cf. Tosafos s.v. (ראי).]

The Midrashic version differs slightly: God said to Jacob: I am the Lord of those on high, while you are the lord of those down below. Ramban explains that there is great Kabbalistic significance to this remark — namely the esoteric allusion that the *Shechinah* rests in *Eretz Yisrael*; he concludes that only those immersed in *Kaballah* will understand.

Ramban has yet another version of this Midrash: Jacob is describing God as Lord of those on high and himself as the master of those below (see *Gur Aryeh*).

[The commentators remark that Jacob was punished for the haughtiness of this remark with the incident of Dinah, which immediately follows this narrative.]

God called Jacob 'El' on earth — a reference to his new name *Yisra-El* — since he was to be master down below. This also alludes to the merit of the righteous who actually dominate the world, even possessing the power through their prayers to annul decrees that are issued on High (*Me'am Loez*).

Rashi concludes: [Regarding the

¹ Now Dinah — the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob — went out to look over the

various explanations perceived in a Scriptural verse, it may be observed that] 'the words of the Torah admit to many different interpretations,

like a hammer splitting the rock into many different pieces. I, however, make it my aim to render the plain sense of Scripture.'

XXXIV

§ The abduction of Dinah.

Jacob, who had overcome the terrible trials of the past twenty years and believed that at last he would find tranquility upon his return to *Eretz Yisrael* — as the end of the last chapter seems to indicate — suddenly faces a setback in his destiny. His household is subjected to a succession of calamities: the abduction of his daughter, Rachel's premature death, and Joseph's disappearance. Our Sages, in introducing the following account cite *Psalms* 75:5, *I said to the joyous ones: Cease your rejoicings*, for, as they explain, joy is but transitory.

Nevertheless, this people, which is called on to be a nation of priests and God's standard-bearer on earth, had to experience a moral outrage upon its own flesh and blood right from its beginning. It had to undergo this ordeal so that the world could see in its swift and uncompromising reaction the sacred character of its purity. It had to suffer this outrage so that it could harden the steel of the natural soul for all time (*R' Munk; R' Hirsch*).

1. נחצא ריגה בת לאה — Now Dinah, the daughter of Leah ... went out.^[1]

— From her abode on the outskirts of the city, into the town of Shechem (*Rashbam; Radak*).

— Dinah is referred to in our verse as *the daughter of Leah*. Was she not the daughter of Jacob? [i.e., why is she not identified in the common Scriptural manner, by her father's name rather than her mother's?] But because she *went out* — in violation of the code of modesty becoming a daughter of Jacob — she is called the *daughter of Leah* because Leah, too, was an excessively outgoing person (נחצאנית), as it is written [30:16]: *And Leah went out to meet him*. With her in mind, they formulated the proverb, 'Like mother like daughter' [see *Ezekiel* 16:44-45] (*Rashi* from *Midrash* and *Tanchuma*).

Although, as we shall see below [see *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*], Shechem took steps to lure Dinah out of the house, she would not have gone had she not inherited her mother's nature as an extrovert (*Or HaChaim*).

1. *R' Bachya* records that the incident of Dinah was in punishment for several sins committed by Jacob:

1) When he told Laban [30:33], 'Let my integrity testify for me in the future' God said, 'Does anyone know what the future will bring? In the future your daughter will be humbled' [see *comm.* there].

2) For having concealed Dinah in a chest, and not giving Esau the opportunity of marrying him. This was considered wrong since she might have been a good influence on him and inspired him to repent [see *comm.* to 32:23]. Furthermore, he should have had more faith in

וישלח ב בבנות הארץ: וירא אתה שכם בן-חמור
לדב-ג החוי נשיא הארץ ויקח אתה וישכב
ג אתה ויענה: ותדבק נפשו בדינה בת-

Dinah paraded about bedecked in jewelry, and thus attracted Shechem's attention; jewelry ought to be worn only inside the house (*Koheles Rabbah*; *Abarbanel*).

According to *Ramban*, Dinah is referred to as the daughter of Leah to allude that she was the full sister of Simeon and Levi, who, as we shall see, avenged her [v. 25].

אשר ילדה ליצקב — *Whom she had borne to Jacob.*

Jacob, too, is mentioned, for it was only because she was the daughter of the venerated Jacob that Shechem took notice of her and perpetrated his shameful act upon her, as shall be explained later (*Or HaChaim*).

Even though she was abused, and may even have borne a share of the blame for having entered the society of strangers, she nevertheless deserves respect as one worthy of the title 'daughters of Jacob' (*R' Hirsch*).

According to *Ramban*, *whom she had borne to Jacob* is added to indicate that even her half-brothers — all of them children of Jacob — were protective of her honor.

לראות בבנות הארץ — *To look over the daughters of the land.*

Dinah's motives are not clear. *Targum Yonasan* renders: למיחוי — בנימוס בנת עמי ארעא, i.e., she went

out, as girls do, to see how the girls dressed and what jewelry they wore (*HaKsav V'HaKabbalah*).

She was young and curious (*R' Hirsch*).

Tanchuma Yashan interprets: 'To see and to be seen,' i.e., to display her own beauty; therefore she was punished.

According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 38, Dinah, as Jacob's daughter, always stayed at home and would not venture into the streets. Shechem became aware that the venerated Jacob had a daughter, and brought girls along to her house to frolic and play the timbrels. When Dinah went out to watch them playing, he seized her and raped her. From this union, Asenath was born [cf. 30:26; Asenath later became Joseph's wife.]

2. וירא אתה — [*And he*] ... saw her.

It would have been far better for the wicked had they been blind. Their gaze brings a curse upon the world! (*Tanchuma Balak* 2).

שכם בן-חמור החוי — *Shechem, son of Chamor the Hivite.*

Was he then a Hivite? He was an Amorite as noted in 48:22 — Rather חוי is an adjective meaning *serpentine* in Aramaic [see *Onkelos* to 3:1]. This describes the serpent-like

God; rather than concealing her in a chest, he should have prayed to God that Esau not marry her, just as Leah did when she was regarded as Esau's future bride.

3) Because he was presumptuous in referring to himself as the Lord of the lower world [see *comm.* to 33:20].

Rashi to 35:1 adds that it was in punishment for Jacob delaying in going home [and setting up, instead, his residence in Shechem; see *comm.* there]; and for postponing the fulfillment of his vows (*Midrash*).

Jacob is further criticized for allowing his daughter to venture out alone and bedecked with jewelry, which should only be worn in the house (*Tanchuma*; *Abarbanel*).

34 daughters of the land. ² Shechem, son of Chamor the
2-3 Hivite, the prince of the region, saw her; he took her,
lay with her, and violated her. ³ He became deeply at-

manner in which Shechem acted. King Solomon said [Eccles. 10:8]: *He who breaks down a fence* [figuratively set up to inhibit improper behavior] *will be bitten by a snake*. Dinah broke down the fence of propriety and was 'bitten' by a snake. Her parents should have forbidden her to go out (*Midrash*).

יְנִיחַ הָאֶרֶץ — The prince of the region.

The appellation *prince of the region* refers to Shechem not Chamor. That Shechem was the prince is suggested by *Ibn Janach* and *Ramban* in their commentaries to a similar passage in *Ecclesiastes* 1:1 where the appellation *King of Jerusalem* refers to *Kohes*, not *David*; and *Ibn Ezra* in reference to *Isaiah son of Amotz*, the prophet. It is also suggested by *Ramban* to our verse [see below] who mentions that it was to Dinah's credit that she resisted — though unsuccessfully — the advances of the *prince of the region* — obviously Shechem.

That he was the *prince of the region* explains why, notwithstanding Dinah's screams, no one came to her aid (*Or HaChaim*).

וַיִּקַּח אֹתָהּ — [And] he took her.

I.e. he seduced her with words (*Lekach Tov*). [See comm. to *took* meaning *persuasion* in 2:15 and 12:5.]

I.e., Shechem forced himself upon her; there had been no consent or submission on Dinah's part to his efforts of persuasion at all, not even to his initial advances.]

Thus, *Haamek Davar* interprets:

he [forcibly] took her — to his home.

וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ וַיַּעֲזֶנָּה — [And he] lay with her, and violated her.

The use of the double term is perceived by *Rashi* — following the *Midrash* — to denote a double offense: he lay with her — naturally, and violated her — unnaturally.

According to *Ibn Ezra* there was a single act: he violated her naturally — with the heinous act itself — for she had been a maiden.

Ramban maintains that in the literal sense וַיַּעֲזֶנָּה connotes forcible rape. The Torah emphasizes this to draw our attention to the fact that though Shechem was the *prince of the land*, Dinah did not submit of her own free will, but had to be forced.

Ralbag suggests that *Rashi's* Midrashic interpretation is derived from the verb order. Had וַיַּעֲזֶנָּה meant only that he forcibly violated her as *Ramban* maintains, then the verb order should have been וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ וַיַּעֲזֶנָּה, and he forced her and lay with her, which is the verb order in the case of *Amnon* and *Tamar* [*II Samuel* 13:14]. Reading as it does, the verbs suggest an unnatural forced violation subsequent to the initial, natural act.

[Cf. however *Rashi* to *Yoma* 77b s.v. מְבִיאֹת אֲחֵרוֹת where another interpretation is conjectured; see also *Maharsha* ad. loc., and *Pardes Yosef*.]

[Cf. the force suggested by the indefinite article אֶת וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ in a similar phrase in 19:33. In this vein, *Haamek Davar* cites *Lev.* 15:35 that unless there is a special exegetical interpretation, the expression וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ denotes a forcible union, while the expression used for mutual consent is וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּהּ.]

וּשְׁלַח לַדֹּרֶה הַנֶּעֱרָה: וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁכַם אֶל-חֲמוֹר אָבִיו
 יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאחֲזֶה אֶת-הַנֶּעֱרָה וַיִּדְבָּר עַל-לֵב
 לֵאמֹר קַח-לִי אֶת-הַיְלִידָה הַזֹּאת לְאִשָּׁה:
 הַ וַיַּעֲקֹב שָׁמַע כִּי טָמְא אֶת-דִּינָה בְּתוֹ וּבְנָיו
 הָיוּ אֶת-מִקְנֶהּ בְּשָׂדֶה וַהֲחָרַשׁ יַעֲקֹב

3. — וַתִּדְבֶּק נַפְשׁוֹ בְּדִינָה בַת יַעֲקֹב. — [And] he became deeply attached [lit. and his soul cleaved] to Dinah, daughter of Jacob.

— Both because of her great beauty, and because she was the daughter of Jacob, an acknowledged great man (Radak).

Dinah was indeed beautiful, but the Torah did not mention it — as it did in the case of Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel — since Dinah's beauty was her undoing. The Torah speaks only in praise of righteous women, but not of beauty such as Dinah's which resulted in personal tragedy. [Although Sarah and Rebecca, too, were abducted, they were not physically molested] (Ramban to v. 12).

The term נַפֶּשׁוֹ, literally, *his soul*, indicates that Shechem's feelings were profoundly spiritual or intellectual. So deep an attachment on the part of a nobleman can occur only when he views the object as an equal since there can be no 'cleaving of souls' when there are substantial differences in stations of life; the gap in background and culture would preclude it. Shechem could have such strong feelings for Dinah because she, too, was a 'princess' —

the daughter of Jacob who was a princely man (Malbim).

The effect was the reverse in the case of Amnon and Tamor, where once he violated her, he hated her [see II Samuel 13:14ff] (Sforno).

— וַיֹּאחֲזֶה אֶת הַנֶּעֱרָה וַיִּדְבָּר עַל לֵב הַנֶּעֱרָה — [And] he loved the maiden, and he appealed to the maiden's emotions [lit. spoke upon the girl's heart].¹

[He played upon her sensitivities, the heart being considered in Scripture as the seat of the emotions.]

— He spoke upon the girl's heart: words that would settle on the heart, i.e., persuadingly: 'See how much money your father squandered on a small piece of land; if I marry you, you will acquire the city and all its lands!' (Yoma 77b; Rashi).

The maiden who was imprisoned in his home would constantly protest and cry; this is why he tried to console her (Ramban v. 13).

He tried to console her over his act, and appease her anger while at the same time declaring his wish to make her his wife (Radak; Ibn Ezra).

[On the use of the term *speaking upon the heart* to connote *consoling words*, see Isaiah 40:2.]

1. [The word נַעֲרָה, *maiden*, is spelled throughout the Torah without the final ה, (נָעֶר), as though it were the masculine נָעֶר, *lad*. The Talmud (Kesubos 40b) notes that only once, in Deut. 22:19 is it spelled out fully, and there the full spelling indicates that the maiden is at least twelve years old — a fully developed young lady. Otherwise, Scripture refers to a girl similar to a lad, i.e., one who is not yet, or not necessarily, twelve years old, the age of feminine maturity. Cf. on Rebecca, *comm.* to 24:14.

In our case, following the Rabbinic chronology that all Jacob's children except Benjamin

tached to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the maiden and appealed to the maiden's emotions. ⁴ So Shechem said to Chamor, his father, as follows, 'Get me this girl for a wife.'

⁵ Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah, while his sons were with his cattle in the field;

Malbim suggests that it had not originally been Shechem's intention to marry Dinah; he had merely wanted to satisfy his lust. It was only after he violated her that he gained respect for her as Jacob's daughter. Then he became deeply attached to her, and loved the maiden — for the sake of her own beauty and virtue. Had he truly loved her earlier, he would never have inflicted on her a disgrace tantamount to murder. It was now, after the act, when his animal passion had subsided, that he regretted what he had done and tried to comfort her from her sorrow and grief.

4. קח-לי אֶת־יְלִדָּהּ הַזֹּאת לְאִשָּׁה — Get me this girl [the Hebrew implies: young girl see footnote to v. 3] for a wife.

קח, take, in Hebrew denotes persuasion [see 2:15 and 12:5] (Abarbanel).

5. Jacob's family learns of Dinah's violation.

וַיִּשְׁמָע יַעֲקֹב — Now [i.e., in the meanwhile; lit. and] Jacob heard.

There had been great indignation throughout the town at Shechem's heinous act. The morality of the

people had been breached, for Shechem violated the taboo against promiscuous fornication. A member of the nobility had transgressed, and Jacob heard of it (*Lekach Tov*; *Alshich*; see *Rashi* to v. 7 וְכֵן לֹא יִצְשָׁה).

וְכֵן טָמְאָה אֶת־יְלִדָּהּ בָּתּוּ — That he had defiled his daughter Dinah.

That he, i.e., Shechem. The other pronouns in this verse refer to Jacob (*Radak*).

[It must also be conjectured that Jacob's suspicions must have been aroused when Dinah did not return home. As is evident from v. 26, she was being held a prisoner in Shechem's home. Jacob might have inquired after her and heard the dastardly news.]

According to *Sefer HaYashar*, Jacob sent two servants to bring Dinah home from Shechem's house, but when they arrived there, Shechem and his men drove them away. The servants observed Shechem making advances to her before their very eyes. When the servants reported back to Jacob, he was convinced that, indeed, Shechem had defiled his daughter Dinah.

The term טָמְאָה, defiled, reflects the

were born during his second seven-year period of labor, and that Dinah was older than Joseph who was born at the very end of the seven-year period, Dinah was about eight-years old by this time. R' *Bachya* derives this from the fact that Jacob worked an additional six years before he fled, and he had spent, as noted, eighteen months in Succoth. Add the additional half year or so until Dinah's birth — since the Sages calculate that the children were born seven months apart — and Dinah was therefore about a month older than eight by this time.

Thus, as *Lekach Tov* observes, in v. 4 Shechem refers to her as a יְלִדָּה, little girl.]

וישלח לדורו
 ויצא חמור אבי־שכם אל־
 יעקב לדבר אתו: ובני יעקב באו מן־
 השדה כשמעם ויתעצבו האנשים ויחר
 להם מאד כי נבלה עשה בישראל
 לשכב את־בת־יעקב וכן לא יעשה:

status of a woman so violated. She would henceforth live in shame shunned by all (*Ramban* to v. 12).

Cf. this term's use in the prohibition of forbidden unions in *Lev. 18:24* (*R' Shmuel ben Chafni Gaon*).

והקשר יעקב עד־באם — So [lit. and] *Jacob kept silent until their arrival*.

He avoided any outward expression of grievance until his sons arrived home to learn of the episode and make provision for their own safety (*Sforno*).

Apparently he sent for them and then awaited their arrival (*Or HaChaim*).

Abarbanel suggests the contrary, that Jacob did not summon them lest the sudden shock of the news be too great. Instead, he kept silent and waited for them to arrive at day's end.

The *Midrash* cites *Proverbs* 11:12: *A man of discernment holds his peace*.

The word *הקריש*, *kept silent*, is spelled defectively [without a י (*הקריש*)]. This draws attention to the word and implies that his silence was total (*Sechel Tov*).

Jacob maintained his patient silence only, as the verse noted, because he heard that Shechem had already violated his daughter. It was a *fait accompli* and there was nothing Jacob could now do to undo it. Had the act not yet taken place, Jacob would certainly have sacrificed his very being to prevent her defilement (*Alshich; Malbim*).

6. ויצא חמור אבי־שכם — [And] *Chamor, Shechem's father, went out*.

He noticed that Jacob was maintaining his silence and he grew worried that Jacob was plotting against him (*Sforno*).

R' Meyuchas holds that Jacob maintained his absolute silence even in Chamor's presence and refused to talk with him until his children returned home.

7. ובני יעקב באו מן השדה כשמעם — [And] *Jacob's sons arrived [home] from the field, when they heard [the news]*.

[Apparently the ugly news reached them out in the fields.]

They arrived at Jacob's tent at about the same time as Chamor, and they did not have the opportunity to consult privately with their father (*Rashbam; Malbim*).

[Our translation follows the punctuation of the Masoretic cantillation. *R' Tanchuma* in the *Midrash* observes that our verse is ambiguous inasmuch as the syntactic relationship of the word *כשמעם* is obscure and the verse could also be read to mean: *Jacob's sons came in from the field; ויתעצבו כשמעם ויתעצבו: האנשים*, and when they heard it, the men were distressed. However, the Sages disagree and it is their interpretation that we follow.]

ויתעצבו האנשים — [And] *the men [i.e., Jacob's sons] were distressed*.

At Shechem's outrage (see *Sforno* below).

The term *עצב*, *distress*, refers to an affront committed against one's own person or ideal. In a real sense

so Jacob kept silent until their arrival.

⁶ Chamor, Shechem's father, went out to Jacob to speak to him. ⁷ Jacob's sons arrived from the field when they heard. The men were distressed, and were fired deeply with indignation, for he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with a daughter of Jacob — such a thing may not be done!

the outrage was committed against them since, as they explain in v. 14, it was a disgrace for the children of Israel to be associated with an uncircumcized man. But this distress was relatively mild compared with the *חרון*, indignation, they felt [see below] concerning the breach of the high moral standards of Israel — a code which Shechem could hardly be expected to comprehend (Abarbanel).

[On the verb *עצב* denoting grief, vexation, sadness, see comm. to 6:6.]

ויחר להם מאד — [And] they were fired deeply with indignation [lit. and it seethed them very much].

[The translation follows R' Hirsch. See comm. to 32:2 for various connotations of the verb *חרה*.]

According to Abarbanel, the term refers to one whose anger is such that he seeks revenge. Thus, they were fired with indignation since he had physically abducted her — a thing not to be done even by heathen standards.

בי נבלה עשה בישראל לשכב את בת יעקב — For he [Shechem] had com-

mitted an outrage in Israel by lying [lit. to lie] with a daughter of Jacob.

— It was considered an outrage in Israel — a nation which had high standards of morality and which viewed such dastardly acts with utter contempt (*Levush*; see below).

According to Ramban: It was considered an outrage in Israel — but not among the heathen nations, who were steeped in such immorality.

[Rashi would disagree with this latter interpretation; see below *יבן לא יעשה*.]

The root *נבל* in its various contexts refers to: ruin, withering, weakening of forces, moral degradation. Therefore, *נבלה* refers to a disgraceful act demonstrating total moral degeneracy. Furthermore, it demonstrates complete contempt for the victim (R' Hirsch).

The term *Israel* is an anachronism since the nation of Israel did not yet exist. It refers to the progeny of Jacob who would later be called Israel (*Lekach Tov*).⁽¹⁾

יבן לא יעשה — Such a thing may not be done!

Such a violation of maidens is intolerable, the heathen nations renounced immorality after the Flood, which had come upon the

1. R' Munk observes in this context that this is the first time the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are referred to by this name — and it occurs even before God had conferred the name upon Jacob. They already considered themselves part of the nation which will be a 'priestly people' called on to 'fight for God'. What a lofty concept of duty, virtue, and moral nobility is already connected with this august name! It is particularly significant that the first 'struggle for God' with which the name 'Israel' (ישראל) is connected is in defense of the sacred ideal of moral purity. The first mission of the 'children of Israel' is to safeguard this ideal.

וישלח לד/ח-יא ח וידבר חמור אתם לאמר שכם בני חשקה נפשו בבתכם תנו נא אתה לו ט לאשה: והתחתנו אתנו בנתיכם תתנו י לנו ואת-בנותינו תקחו לכם: ואתנו תשבו והארץ תהיה לפניכם שבו יא וסחרוה והאחזו בה: ויאמר שכם אל-

world as a consequence of this sin (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).

Although the legal status of a maiden is less stringent than other forbidden degrees of unchastity — such as married women or various forms of incest — nevertheless, since he *abducted her and forced her*, she is considered a completely forbidden woman (ערוה), and Shechem was fully liable (*Mizrachi*).

Ramban disagrees with *Rashi's* view that even the heathens of that region would not condone such immoral behavior, on the ground that the Canaanites were steeped in immorality and were more corrupt than the other nations. This is explicitly stated in God's later reference to their abominations in *Leviticus* 18:27. Apparently, such was traditional Canaanite behavior. Furthermore, earlier chapters show clearly that even in the days of Abraham and Isaac the Patriarchs were constantly apprehensive that they would be killed and their wives abducted. [See also *comm.* to 12:13 and 20:13 where *Ramban* maintains that it was Abraham's usual procedure from the time he left Charan to describe Sarah as his sister wherever they went.]

Thus, *Ramban* concludes, the words in *Israel* in the preceding phrase apply here too, the sense of the passage being: *For he had committed an outrage in Israel ... a thing not to be done — in Israel*, although it might be tolerated by heathen nations.

Mizrachi defends *Rashi* by differing with *Ramban's* interpretation in several respects:

(a) A reading of *Leviticus* 18:27 cited by *Ramban* would tend to imply that the Canaanite abominations were recent, not traditional among them. Were they steeped

in immorality from Patriarchal times as *Ramban* suggests, the land would have spewed them out even earlier.

(b) That Abraham and Isaac were constantly apprehensive that they would be murdered and their wives abducted proves the contrary. The Canaanites were very scrupulous in regard to adultery, but they treated murder lightly [see *comm.* to 12:12]. This is why they would murder the husband to release the wife from her forbidden status. Proof of the importance they attached to the prohibition against adultery is Pharaoh's indignant response to Abraham (12:18): *What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she is your wife?*; and Abimelech's angry retort to Isaac (26:10): *One of the people has nearly lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us!*

Thus, *Levush* explains that according to *Rashi* the sense of our passage would be: *For he had committed an outrage in Israel* — a nation which had high standards of morality and viewed such dastardly acts with utter contempt, and furthermore, it was a thing not to be done — for even among the heathen nations of that time, who had renounced immorality as a consequence of the Flood, such an act was taboo.

According to *Radak*: *And a thing not to be done* — not even to the daughter of a commoner, much less to the daughter of the renowned Jacob.

Sforno perceives the sense of the verse to be: The brothers were distressed at the outrage which had been perpetrated in *Israel*, and furthermore, *וכן לא יעשה*, it was something not done — such an offense had never before been committed against a daughter of a person of renown, therefore they were fired with indignation at the un-

⁸ Chamor spoke with them saying, 'My son, Shechem, longs deeply for your daughter — please give her to him as a wife, ⁹ and intermarry with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰ And among us you shall dwell; the land will be open before you — settle and trade in it, and acquire property in it.'

precedented, contemptuous act.

Furthermore, the future tense implies: *And such* — though done now for the first time — *should not be done* — in the future; the necessary steps must be taken to assure that such a heinous act never again takes place (*Divrei Shaul*).

8. אִתָּם — *With them.*

Since Chamor met the brothers at Jacob's tent, he addressed them all (*Rashbam*).

בְּבָתְּכֶם — *For your daughter.*

— [A polite, plural form.]

Consider the conduct of Shechem and Chamor subsequent to their outrage against Dinah. They approach Jacob as if nothing had happened, with an impeccably honorable proposal! Chamor suggests an alliance of friendship, commerce, and marriage between the two peoples; he apparently feels that a marriage would legitimize the vile act, and all would be forgiven and forgotten (*R' Hoffmann*).

9. וְהִתְחַתְּנוּ אִתָּנוּ — *And intermarry with us.*

Intermarriage with foreigners was usually forbidden. As prince of the region he was granting specific dispensation (*Abarbanel*).

בְּנֹתֵיכֶם תִּתְּנֶנָּה לָנוּ וְאֵת בְּנֹתֵינוּ תִקַּח לָכֶם — *Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves.*

This proposal gave Jacob and his sons the controlling right to exercise

the initiative: they would give whomever they desired and take whomever they pleased. But when he reported it to his townspeople [v. 21], he reversed the terms in order to gain their approval; he made it appear as though the Shechemites would have the right to decide (*Rashbam*). [*Rashi* makes this observation in his *comm.* to the parallel phrase in v. 16 where Jacob's sons similarly give themselves the initiative.]

10. וְאִתָּנוּ תֵּשְׁבוּ — *And among us you shall dwell.*

Among us — as our equal (*Haamek Davar*).

Chamor offered the further inducement of permanent domicile within the citizenry. This, too, was usually forbidden to aliens (*Abarbanel*).

וְשָׁבוּ וְסָחֲרוּהָ וְהָאָחוּז בָּהּ — *Settle and trade in it, and acquire property [lit. be grasped] in it.*

Here, too, a special license was offered them, because, normally, strangers were not allowed to trade (*Sforno*).

The verb הָאָחוּז, *be grasped*, is related in this context to אֲחוּזָה, *real holdings* (*Ibn Janach*).

It has been observed that the cordiality of Chamor's invitation is in contrast to what he told his townsman in verse 23. To induce them to adopt his suggestion, he promised that it would be profitable to them and they would

ושלח לדיב־יג אָבִיהָ וְאֶל־אֶחָיו אֲמָצֶאֶחַן בְּעֵינֵיהֶם
 יב וְאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי אַתָּן: הֲרָבּוּ עָלַי מֵאֵד
 מִהֶר וּמִתֵּן וְאֶתְנָה בְּאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי
 יג וְתִנּוּ־לִי אֶת־הַנֶּעֱרָ לְאִשָּׁה: וַיַּעַן בְּנֵי־
 יַעֲקֹב אֶת־שֹׁכֶם וְאֶת־חֲמוֹר אָבִיו
 בְּמִרְמָה וַיִּדְּבְרוּ אֲשֶׁר טָמָא אֶת דִּינָה

gradually absorb the rich possessions of Jacob's household (*Heidenheim*).

11. וַיֹּאמֶר שֹׁכֶם אֶל אָבִיהָ וְאֶל אֶחָיו. — *Then Shechem said to her [i.e., Dinah's] father and brothers.*

Shechem now mustered up the impudence to speak on his own behalf (*Pesikta Zutresa*).

— He goes into more specific detail regarding his proposal than did his father (*Abarbanel*); and tries to make it more acceptable by offering a huge dowry (*Haamek Davar*).

אֲמָצֶא הֵן בְּעֵינֵיהֶם — *Let me gain favor in your eyes.*

Find it in your hearts to forgive me (*Malbim*).

וְאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי אַתָּן — *And whatever you tell me, I will give.*

In compensation for your humiliation and her diminished value as a result of the loss of her virginity (*Malbim*).

According to *Haamek Davar*: Though the notion of intermarriage with the *others* might be distasteful to you, *let me, personally, gain favor in your eyes* by virtue of my proposal to *pay whatever you wish*; you may fix as high a dowry as you like.

12. הֲרָבּוּ עָלַי מֵאֵד מִהֶר וּמִתֵּן. — *Inflate exceedingly upon me the marriage settlement [lit. dowry] and gifts.*

Shechem made this conciliatory

offer to induce them to give her willingly in marriage, thereby overcoming Dinah's constant protestations and crying. If her family would agree to let her marry him, she might also consent (*Ramban*).

The translation of מִהֶר as *marriage settlement* follows *Rashi* who [consistent with the Rabbinic interpretation of the term in *Yerushalmi Kesubos* 3:1, and *Bavli* *ibid.* 10a, and his *comm.* to *Exodus* 22:16] interprets it to refer to the *Kesubah*, the marriage contract which provides for the financial settlement due the wife in case of divorce or death.

The *Midrash*, upon which *Rashi's* comment is based, explains מִהֶר as *Kesubah*, the wife's settlement as provided for by the marriage contract. The *Midrash* defines מִתֵּן as *מִתְּנָה* פְּרָאִמִּין which is variously defined by the commentators: *Rashi* defines it as a voluntary settlement above the standard amount of the marriage contract; *Matnos Kehunah* defines it as נְכָסֵי מִלּוּג, property which belongs to the wife but is managed by the husband, and the proceeds of which go to him for the duration of the marriage; *Maharzu*, citing *Aruch*, defines it as ordinary gifts given to the bride.

Ramban [consistent with his interpretation in *Exod.* 22:16] explains מִהֶר to refer to סְבִילֹת the bridal gifts given to the bride; מִתֵּן refers to gold and silver gifts given to the father and brother of the bride.

The term מִהֶר, *dowry*, is related to מָהַר, *quickly*, since these gifts hasten the wedding inasmuch as the groom sends these presents

11-13 ¹¹ Then Shechem said to her father and brothers, 'Let me gain favor in your eyes; and whatever you tell me — I will give. ¹² Inflate exceedingly upon me the marriage settlement and gifts and I will give whatëver you tell me; only give me the maiden for a wife.'

¹³ Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Chamor cleverly and they spoke (because he had

ahead of him in eager anticipation, and then comes to his father-in-law's house to make the wedding feast (*Heidenheim*).

Thus Shechem was saying: 'Let me marry her; I will legally bind myself to provide her with a very large marriage settlement, in case of divorce or death. I will also give her a large estate' (*Radak*).

וְאֵתָנָה בְּאֶשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי — And I will give whatever [lit. as] you tell me.

Immediately — as soon as you tell me. This was not a vague promise to pay in the distant future, but a firm commitment to produce the amount immediately upon request. Compare 12:4 where the phrase 'בְּאֶשֶׁר יִדְבֹר אֵלַי ה' as *HASHEM* had spoken, also implies that Abraham complied immediately and did not tinger (*Alshich; Ha'amek Davar*).

13. וַיַּעֲנוּ ... אֶת שְׂכֵם וְאֶת חָמוֹר — And Jacob's sons answered Shechem and Chamor.

Shechem had spoken last, and the response is directed toward him (*R' Hoffmann*).

בְּמַרְמָה — *Cleverly*.

I.e., with wisdom. (*Rashi* following the *Midrash* and *Targum*).

[This negates the other possible translation of בְּמַרְמָה as *deceitfully*. See *comm.* to 27:35 and *comm.* to next stich in this verse.]

The Torah thus bears testimony to the fact that Jacob's sons never seriously considered compromising

on the fundamental restriction against intermarriage. From the very beginning of the discussions, their response was cleverly calculated to extricate Dinah (*Haamek Davar*).

Radak — who interprets מַרְמָה in the sense of *deceit* — observes how it was only Jacob's sons who spoke; Jacob himself scrupulously refrained from deceitful speech. The sons, however, as the verse proceeds to tell us, permitted themselves this deception since Shechem was the violator of their sister.

The Sages did not criticize the sons of Jacob — as they did Laban (see on 24:50) — for answering before their father. Apparently, as *Ramban* concludes, the sons spoke first as a gesture of respect for their father in order to spare him the humiliation of intervening personally in this disgraceful affair.

But, *Ramban* continues, the question arises: Since Jacob was present it appears that they acted with his consent. He obviously understood their scheme, and it must have had at least his *tacit* approval. Why then was he angry afterwards [see v. 30]? His subsequent anger is further perplexing since it is inconceivable that he would have consented to a plan whereby his daughter would be married to a Canaanite who had defiled her. — Therefore, his silence must be construed as knowledge that their offer to Shechem was part of a

וישלה לדיד אַחֶתָם: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֵיהֶם לֹא נוֹכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת

clever plan. In any event, since *all* the brothers conspired in this scheme and shared the responsibility for it, why did Jacob chastise only Simeon and Levi who carried it out [see 49:7]?

However, the original intention of the brothers in demanding the circumcision was merely to deter the people of Shechem. The brothers believed that the Shechemites would not accede to the circumcision proposal, or, if they *would* consent, the brothers would wait until the townsmen would be immobilized on the third day, and taking advantage of their weakness, to forcibly rescue Dinah. Simeon and Levi went *beyond* this however; in their *revenge* they acted alone and wiped out every man in the city. Jacob never dreamt that they were planning to commit mass murder.

Or possibly, Jacob was angry because the townsfolk were innocent; the verse implies that it was only to *Shechem and his father Chamor* that they offered this cunning scheme *because of this outrage he committed in defiling their sister Dinah*; but not to the others.¹¹

וַיִּדְבְּרוּ אֲשֶׁר טָמָא אֶת דִּינָה אֶחֶתָם — *And they spoke (because he had defiled their sister Dinah).*

According to the *Midrash*, these words were interjected parenthetically by the Divine Spirit to justify their 'clever' proposal, and negate any insinuation that *במרמה* means that they were deceitful: R' Nachman said, Do you think we have a case of *deceit* here? No; for it

1. The collective responsibility of the people of Shechem; the seven Noachide laws.

In a lengthy fundamental dissertation, *Ramban* discusses the propriety of the righteous sons of Jacob slaughtering all the males of Shechem. Were not the townsfolk innocent? Since he cites opinions affecting the concept of collective guilt within the framework of the Seven Universal Laws, we shall discuss them fully.

Ramban cites *Rambam* [with slight textual changes] who in *Hilchos Melachim* ch. 9 writes of the *Seven Noachide Laws* [שבע מצות של בני נח], the Universal Laws incumbent upon all mankind [see *comm.* to 2:16, p. 101]. The first six of these laws prohibit: (a) *עבודה זרה*, idolatry; (b) *גזל*, robbery; (c) *נבלה*, blasphemy; (d) *גילוי ערוה*, incest; (e) *שפיכות דמים*, murder; (f) *אכילת בשר חיה*, eating of flesh cut from living animals. The seventh law is entitled *דינים*, code of justice. It requires that they appoint *judges*, in every district, to enforce compliance with the other six laws, and to caution the people concerning them. A Noachide who transgresses any of the seven laws is subject to death by the sword. Anyone who sees a transgressor and does not bring him to justice is himself liable to the same death penalty, because, by ignoring the crime, he has not fulfilled his personal obligation of *דינים*, code of justice. Thus, *Rambam* concludes, 'the people of Shechem had incurred the penalty of death by the sword, because Shechem [prince of the city] had been guilty of robbery [kidnapping]. They saw it, knew about it, and failed to bring him to justice.'

Ramban, however, disagrees. He maintains that if execution of the population were indeed a meritorious act, Jacob would have been the first to slay them; in any case, he certainly would not have criticized Simeon and Levi for it [49:7]!

Ramban maintains that the classification of *דינים*, justice, among the Seven Noachide Laws does not merely entail the appointment of district *judges*, to enforce the other six laws. Rather it imposes the obligation to set up a corpus of laws regulating the conduct of society, such as laws concerning theft, overcharge, property damage, loans and debts, rape and seduction, etc. Each society must adopt a fair, reasonable code of laws, although not all societies are required to have the same law. Violation of such laws constitutes a violation of the seventh Noachide Law and, as such, requires the death penalty. Also included in these 'Laws' is the requirement for heathens to appoint district judges just as Israel was commanded to do [see *Deut.* 16:18], however, the latter is a *positive command*, and failure to perform a positive command does not incur the death penalty. See *Sanhedrin* 58b where it is implicit that only for violation of *admonishments*, i.e., warnings against prohibitions, are they subject to the death penalty; only for a sinful act, but not for inaction, is one liable.

Furthermore, the *Yerushalmi* draws a distinction between a Jewish judge who is prohibited

34 *defiled their sister Dinah).* ¹⁴ *They said to them, 'We* 14

from refusing to render judgment, by the verse *לֹא תִגְדֹּר מִקְנֵי אִישׁ*, *you shall not fear any man* (Deut. 1:17), and a heathen judge who cannot be slain for failing to put himself in the precarious position of judging superiors. This is further proof that only performing a sinful act makes a Noachide liable to death, not a failure to act.

Ramban concludes that the people of Shechem were, like all the iniquitous Canaanite nations [see Levit. 18:27; Deut. 18:9], guilty of overall violations of the Seven Noachide Laws, but it was not the responsibility of Jacob and his sons to bring them to justice. However, Simeon and Levi zealously took matters into their own hands and avenged themselves. Had the people of Shechem become proselytes, Simeon and Levi would not have acted against them, but the brothers considered the Shechemite circumcision to be without significance for they did it not to convert, but to flatter their master.

Jacob, however, was angered at their zeal since, he and his children were not required to endanger themselves to punish the Shechemites for failure to observe the Noachide Laws. In addition, Simeon and Levi violated the trust they had gained by the peaceful impression they gave Shechem and Chamor in v. 16. Furthermore, who could judge the sincerity of their circumcision? — they might have turned to God. Thus, Simeon and Levi had killed them without justification (see also *comm.* above and to 49:5 where additional reasons for Jacob's anger are offered).

[Accordingly, neither Jacob nor his sons, with the exception of Simeon and Levi, ever contemplated subjecting a whole city to the sword. Their only concern was to rescue Dinah from the clutches of her captors and violators. What transpired afterwards was the work of Simeon and Levi alone.]

[The crux of the disagreement between Rambam and Ramban, as explained in *Responsa Chasam Sofer* 2:14, lies in whether a heathen incurs the death penalty for failure to act against one who transgresses a Noachide Law. Though both agree that a heathen is responsible to obey whatever code of law is adopted by his country, they differ in classification: Rambam classifies these social interdictions under the category of *robbery*, while he classifies the requirement of appointing judges as one of the basic Seven Laws for whose violation Noachides are subject to the death penalty. Because such appointment of judges is the basic requirement of this law, a Noachide who fails to do so is liable to the death penalty. Ramban on the other hand, classifies the formulation of a system of justice as the basic requirement for the seventh Noachide Law. Judges must be appointed in order to enforce the laws, but such appointment is not fundamentally required by this seventh law.]

Gur Aryeh questions Rambam's thesis regarding the responsibility of the judges. How could they have been expected to judge the chieftain of the region before whom they stood in mortal fear? Although they were commanded to judge, they could do so only when it was possible; in a case like ours, they would clearly be excused!

In defense of Rambam, *Divrei Shaul* cites *Sefer HaYashar* according to which Judah later defended Simeon and Levi to Jacob on the grounds that no one in the city even questioned Shechem's wantonness, much less judged him. This proved their collective guilt in the matter (cited by *R' Chavel*).

The *Midrash*, while not condoning their action — since Jacob himself condemned it — points out that savage though it was, it was not the result of mere brutality, but of a desire to safeguard the honor of their sister, as Simeon and Levi put it [v. 31]: *Should he treat our sister like a harlot?*

Gur Aryeh offers an entirely different insight into the act of Simeon and Levi. In his view it is unrelated to the Noachide Laws. Only in the case of individual sinners do such laws and the responsibility of the courts come into play. In the case of nations, however, the Torah permits a victim of aggression to go to war against its attacker. Since Canaan and Israel were separate nations, and Shechem committed an aggressive act against Israel, Simeon and Levi had the right to declare war. [If so, the questions of how and whether to counterattack were matters of strategy. Simeon and Levi did so under cover of deception, while Jacob held that his family's situation was too precarious to permit any violent retaliation.]

However, as *R' Munk* observes, though many commentators justify Rambam's opinion that there is collective responsibility for a crime committed in a group and not brought before the courts, nevertheless *Or HaChaim* concludes that neither of those explanations can justify their action in pillaging the town and taking the spoils (cf. v. 27).

וישלח לד-טו-טו טו אשר-לו ערלה כי-חרפה הוא לנו: אך-
בזאת נאות לכם אם תהיו כמנו להמל
טו לכם כל-זכר: ונתנו את-בנותינו לכם

is the Divine Spirit that states that they spoke in such a manner only because he had defiled their sister Dinah.

Rashi similarly observes that the Torah [as the Sacred Historian] mentions this to justify the brothers and testify that their action was not deceitful but clever — for indeed, Shechem had defiled their sister Dinah. [That these words had to be said by God is obvious, because Jacob's sons would surely have wanted to avoid this painful subject (Mizrachi).]

[The translation, and commentators like Rashi above, who view because he had defiled etc. as a parenthetical justification, follow the Masoretic punctuation which places a pause after ויבדו, and they spoke.]

Ibn Ezra suggest two alternate renderings: They answered ... and they spoke to Shechem who had defiled, etc.; or: speaking as they did because he had defiled their sister Dinah.

[In any event, this clause, though separated by a pause, serves to modify the first half of the verse. Comp. אשר טטו in v. 27 below.]

According to Sforzo, these words are not parenthetical but were uttered by Jacob's sons to Chamor and Shechem, the intent being: Shechem's offer of extravagant gifts is inappropriate inasmuch as he had already defiled their sister and for her to accept money would make her seem like a harlot receiving her hire. Nevertheless, Jacob's sons cleverly proceeded to propose circumcision which they thought would be totally unacceptable to Shechem and Chamor, or to their tribesmen — their

intention being to use the demand as a ruse to refuse the marriage and thereby get back Dinah.

14. לא נוכל ... לתת את אחתנו לאיש — אשר לו ערלה — We cannot do this thing — to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised [lit. who has a foreskin].

I.e. we cannot do this thing — i.e., accept an exorbitant monetary settlement — in order to give our sister, etc. (Sechel Tov).

It is beneath their dignity even to reply directly to Shechem's monetary offer. First a question of principle must be solved; their concern is of a higher nature than money (Akeidas Yitzhak).

[The term ערלה, familiarly rendered foreskin, has the more literal meaning of surplusage. See comm. to 17:11. See also 'Purposes of Circumcision' on p. 569.]

לנו — כי חרפה הוא לנו — For that would be a disgrace among us.

— Marriage to an uncircumcised man would disgrace our family for all time (Ibn Ezra).

— To us it is a blemish that goes from generation to generation. If one wishes to insult his friend, he would say to him: 'You are uncircumcised,' or: 'You are the son of one who is uncircumcised' (Rashi) [See Joshua 5:9.]

[Thus, an uncircumcised husband for their sister would cause disgraceful comments for the entire family, and could not be tolerated.]^[1]

1. Even though the command of circumcision was then still relatively new, it had acquired such religious and national significance that it served to separate Jews from idolaters. For a

34 cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who
15-16 is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace among us. ¹⁵ Only on this condition will we acquiesce to you: If you become like us by letting every male among you become circumcised. ¹⁶ Then we will give our daughters to you, and take your daughters to

— This marriage would give the impression that there was no suitable circumcised man to marry her (*Sforno*).

And were we to intermarry with you while you are still uncircumcised you would eventually mock us for being circumcised (*Chizkuni*).

15. אַרְבּוֹזָא נְאוֹת לָכֶם — Only on this condition [lit. only in this] will we acquiesce to you.

נְאוֹת, *acquiesce*, [root נֹא, the נ being a first person plural prefix] has the same meaning in *II Kings* 12:9 וַיֵּאָמְרוּ, and they consented (*Rashi*).

[Cf. the derivative noun תַּאֲוָה, *desire*.]

אם תהיו כָּמוֹנוּ לְהַמֵּל לָכֶם כָּל זָכָר — If you [will] become like us by letting every male among you become circumcised.

— [Every male — so that any difference between our people and yours would disappear, and we can integrate freely with one another].⁽¹⁾

Further, by specifically stating if you will become like us rather than

simply, if you will undergo circumcision they meant that as part of the circumcision rite, the Shechemites would also have to accept upon themselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven as sincere converts. This, as we shall see, the Shechemites did not accept, despite their agreement to circumcise themselves (*Minchah Belulah*).

Their purpose in choosing circumcision as the scheme by which to render them helpless for the massacre, was to inflict injury on the organ by which Shechem perpetrated his base act (*Sifsei Kohen*).

[The translation of הָמֵל לָכֶם in the passive *niphal* — shall be circumcised — follows *Rashi* here, and the parallel passage in 17:10.]

16. וְנָתַנוּ אֶת־בָּנוֹתֵינוּ לָכֶם וְאֶת־בָּנוֹתֵיכֶם נָקַח לָנוּ — Then we will give our daughters to you, and take your daughters to ourselves.

See *Rashbam* on the parallel phrase in verse 9. *Rashi* makes the observation here that in Jacob's sons' reply they too make the initiative rest with themselves — we will

Jewish woman to marry an uncircumcised man was shameful — a disgrace. This response sums up in a few telling words the Jewish conception which is still valid to this day: between pure and impure, no union is possible (*R' Munk*).

1. It has been pointed out that Chamor and Shechem are obviously convinced that the refusal to sanction Dinah's marriage is not based on the family's 'social arrogance,' but results from higher necessity. They must be glad that the obstacle is not insurmountable, as differences of 'race' or alien 'blood' would have been. Indeed, differences of race have never been an obstacle to joining Israel, which does not recognize the concept of 'purity of blood.'

The prohibition against marrying Canaanites has a religious foundation. (*Ex.* 34:12 ff; *Deut.* 7:3), while that against marrying Ammonites and Moabites has moral reasons (*Deut.* 23:4ff). Circumcision, together with acceptance of the Commandments and immersing, turn a man of foreign origin into an Israelite (*Ex.* 12:48) (*Heidenheim*).

וּשְׁלַח לְדִוְיָכָא וְאֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם נִקְחָלָנוּ וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ אִתְּכֶם
 י וְהִינּוּ לָעַם אֶחָד: וְאִם־לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ
 אֵלֵינוּ לְהַמּוֹל וּלְקַחְנוּ אֶת־בָּתְנוּ וְהִלְכְנוּ:
 יח וַיִּטְבוּ דְבָרֵיהֶם בְּעֵינֵי חָמור וּבְעֵינֵי שָׁם
 יט בֶּן־חָמור: וְלֹא־אֶתֶר הַנֶּעַר לַעֲשׂוֹת
 הַדָּבָר כִּי חָפֵץ בְּבַת־יַעֲקֹב וְהוּא נִכְבָּד
 כ מִכָּל בֵּית אָבִיו: וַיָּבֹא חָמור וּשְׁכֵם בָּנוּ
 אֶל־שַׁעַר עִירָם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֶל־אֲנָשֵׁי עִירָם

give ... and we will take ... Compare, however, how Shechem describes the arrangement to his tribesmen in v. 21, making the initiative appear to rest with them.

The second נ in וְנָתַן has a *dagesh* (which grammatically indicates a dropped letter) since it serves the purpose of two נ's; the word should technically be conjugated as וְנָתַנּוּ from the root נתן and the plural suffix נ. [But when double consonants occur in this way together, one is dropped for ease of pronunciation. Cf. *comm.* to חָנָן in 33:11] (*Rashi*).

[And] — וַיִּשְׁכְּנוּ אִתְּכֶם וְהִינּוּ לָעַם אֶחָד
we will dwell with you, and become a single people.

[In v. 13 *Ramban* makes the point that it was *this* condition that was the source of Jacob's later agitation when his sons took the lives of the Shechemites. Whatever the evils of the townspeople, his sons had made them a condition — and broken it!]

17. — וְאִם לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ אֵלֵינוּ לְהַמּוֹל
But if you will not listen to us to be incircumcised.

Jacob's sons also avoided any reference to Shechem's vile deed, or even to the fact that Dinah was incarcerated in his house. They merely made it clear, that should Shechem refuse their proposal they will take their daughter [i.e., sister; see

below] and go. The implication was clear: In no way will we permit her to be married to one who is uncircumcised; therefore if you do not consent — although she is no longer a maiden and will be entitled to a smaller marriage settlement in consequence — we are not concerned but *we will take our daughter and go* (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

— [Then] we will take our daughter and go.

— Though she is still in your house, we will take her from you and go with all our wealth, from which you will derive no benefit (*Sforno*).

They called Dinah their daughter not sister since they were speaking in behalf of their father (*Tur*); and because she was still a minor (*Ibn Ezra*).

By referring to Dinah as their daughter, they emphasized to him that if their terms were not accepted, they would be prepared to jeopardize themselves for her as would a father for his daughter. Cf. *Tanchuma* cited by *Ramban* in *comm.* to 19:8 (*Haamek Davar*).

18. The Shechemites accept.

— וַיִּטְבוּ דְבָרֵיהֶם בְּעֵינֵי חָמור
Their proposal [lit. words] seemed good in the view of Chamor.

The father was as foolish as the son! (*Lekach Tov*).

ourselves; we will dwell with you, and become a single people. ¹⁷ But if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, we will take our daughter and go.'

¹⁸ Their proposal seemed good in the view of Chamor, and in the view of Shechem, Chamor's son.

¹⁹ The youth did not delay doing the thing, for he wanted Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most respected of all his father's household.

²⁰ Chamor — with his son Shechem — went to the gate of their city and spoke to the people of their city,

וְעֵינֵי שָׁכֵם בְּיָהֱמוֹר — And in the view [lit. eyes] of Shechem, Chamor's son.

If it seemed fair to Chamor it certainly would have seemed fair to Shechem; why then is it necessary to give Shechem's positive reaction? — In making their proposal, the brothers were careful to put it in such a way that it *could* be interpreted that they insisted upon the circumcision *only* of Shechem himself. While they explicitly mentioned the prospective husband (v. 14), they did not say *directly* that *all* tribesmen had to be circumcised. This careful omission was to avoid the risk that the very suggestion might so anger the townspeople that they would become violent. As a result, Shechem understood that he might be the *only* one with the 'humiliating mark of circumcision'. It was to this possibility that he had to give his separate assent (*Haamek Davar*).

19. וְלֹא־אָחַר הַנָּעוּר לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר — [And] the youth did not delay doing the thing.

I.e., in presenting the proposal to his townsmen; or alternately, in setting an example by submitting immediately to circumcision even before he revealed the proposal to

the others (*Abarbanel*).

— So consumed was he with passion for יַעֲקֹב, Jacob's daughter (*Lekach Tov*).

וְהוּא נִכְבֵּר מְכֹל בֵּית אָבִיו — Now [lit. and] he was the most respected of all his father's house[hold].

And he was accordingly confident that the others would consent — so great was his influence upon them as the *most respected of all his father's household* (*Rashbam; Hoffmann*).

According to *Sforno*, the syntax is: Although he was the *most respected of all his father's household* [and therefore could have waited to circumcise himself last], nevertheless, the youth lost no time [and set himself as the example] ... so strongly did he desire Jacob's daughter.

20. וַיָּבֹא חָמוֹר וּשְׁכֵם בְּנוֹ אֶל שַׁעַר עִירָם — [And] Chamor—with his son Shechem—went [lit. came] to the gate of their city.

[The Hebrew וַיָּבֹא, *went*, is in the singular, indicating that they both came as one — with a common purpose.]

— The gate was where the elders and important citizens would congregate (*Radak*).

וּשְׁלַח כֹּא לֵאמֹר: הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה שְׁלָמִים הֵם
 לָדֹכָא כֹּג אֲתָנוּ וַיֵּשְׁבוּ בָאָרֶץ וַיִּסְחָרוּ אִתְּהּ וְהָאָרֶץ
 הִנֵּה רַחֲבַת יָדַיִם לִפְנֵיהֶם אֶת־בְּנֵתָם
 נִקְח־לָנוּ לְנָשִׁים וְאֶת־בְּנֵיתֵינוּ נִתֵּן לָהֶם:
 כֹּכ אַךְ־בָּזְאֵת יֵאָתוּ לָנוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְשִׁכְתָּ
 אֲתָנוּ לִהְיוֹת לְעַם אֶחָד בְּהִמּוֹל לָנוּ כָּל־
 כֹּג זָכָר כְּאֲשֶׁר הֵם גְּמֻלִים: מְקַנְהֵם וּקְנִינֵם
 וְכָל־בְּהֵמָתָם הִלּוּא לָנוּ הֵם אַךְ נִאֲוֹתָהּ

[The gates of a city, like the gates around the Old City of Jerusalem today, were fairly large edifices. They were not gathering places for idlers, but for the assembly of the dignitaries of the land. So we find throughout Scripture that the elders and judges stationed themselves at the gate of a city. Boaz, who was a judge, sat at the gate (*Ruth* 4:1); as did Mordechai (who stationed himself at the gate of the King; see *comm.* to *Esther* 2:19). Solomon praises the woman of valor whose husband is known at the gates, where he sits among the elders of the land (*Prov.* 31:23). Commercial transactions took place and disputes were settled at the gate of a city.]

Apparently, sufficient time had elapsed since Shechem's circumcision for the wound to heal enough to permit him to go to the city gate (*R' Hoffmann*).

21. Chamor presents the plan in the most glamorous light possible. He tactfully avoids any mention of the *personal* benefit his son sought thereby; the implication is that the town as a *whole* will benefit from this new association, and that Chamor is selflessly interested only in the community's welfare (*R' Hoffmann*).

— הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה שְׁלָמִים הֵם אֲתָנוּ
 These people are peaceable with us.

In spite of the wrong perpetrated on them, they are peaceable and whole-hearted [שלם ובלב שלם (*Rashi*)] toward us; they have no intention of taking revenge and you need not fear them (*Radak; Sforino*).

Therefore, you need not undertake any security measures to guard yourselves against them (*Ramban*).

— וְהָאָרֶץ הִנֵּה רַחֲבַת יָדַיִם לִפְנֵיהֶם — *For see, there is ample room in the land for them* [lit. and the land, behold there is breadth of hands before them.]

— You will lose nothing through their trade, for an abundant amount of merchandise is brought here and there are not enough buyers for it. The metaphor of רַחֲבַת יָדַיִם, *breadth of hands*, is that of a man whose hand is large and generous; hence it denotes *plentifulness; adequacy* (*Rashi*).

By their presence they will generate new commerce from which we will all prosper (*Haamek Davar*).

[Shechem added this to justify letting in foreigners who will compete with them.]

— אֶת בָּתָּם נִקְח־לָנוּ לְנָשִׁים — *Let us take their daughters for ourselves as wives.*

Here Chamor assigns to his

saying, ²¹ 'These people are peaceable with us; let them settle in the land and trade in it, for see, there is ample room in the land for them! Let us take their daughters for ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them. ²² Only on this condition will the people acquiesce with us to dwell with us to become a single people: that our males become circumcised as they themselves are circumcised. ²³ Their livestock, their possessions, and all their animals — won't they be ours? Let us but acquiesce to them and they will settle with us.'

townspeople the initiative of which daughters to give and take, in order to induce them to cooperate with his proposal (Rashi; see Rashbam to v. 9).

22. אַךְ בְּזֹאת ... בְּהֵמוֹל לָנוּ כָּל-זָכָר — *Only on this condition [lit. on this] ... that our males become circumcised as they themselves are circumcised.*

What have we to lose thereby? We can only gain since they are wealthy and there is sufficient pasture for all our herds (Radak).

23. And furthermore ...

מִקְנֵהֶם וְקִנְיָנָם וְכָל-בְּהֵמָתָם — *Their livestock, [and] their possessions and all their animals.*

— All the riches they have accumulated (Heidenheim) ...

Ramban defines the terms מִקְנָה, livestock, and בְּהֵמָה, animals, and discusses the difference between them:

מִקְנָה, literally possession, acquisition, refers to cattle which are part of herds in the field [see Exod. 9:3] — whether clean or unclean — since they constitute the mainstay of one's substance. בְּהֵמָה, animals, includes those domestic animals which do not constitute a herd and cannot be called cattle.

Alternatively, Ramban suggests that the two terms are synonymous, the

repetition being to emphasize the vastness of the herds.

הֲלוֹא לָנוּ הֵם — *Won't they be ours?*

This is how it always ended: The stranger came, toiled, and accumulated wealth which ultimately reverted to his hosts. To induce them to accept his suggestion, Chamor promised that it would be profitable to them and they would gradually absorb the rich possessions of Jacob's household. He showed them that it was worth their pains to accede to the strange condition made by Jacob's sons. Contrast this with the seeming cordiality of Chamor's invitation to Jacob in verse 10! (Heidenheim).

The Midrash derives from this remark that their circumcision was not undertaken for the sake of Heaven, but out of greed for Israel's possessions. In the end they lost even what they themselves possessed.

אֲךְ נְאוּתָהּ לָהֶם וַיִּשְׁבוּ אִתָּנוּ — *Let us but acquiesce to them, and they will settle with us.*

I.e. Just let us acquiesce to them — by submitting to circumcision — and as a result they will settle with us (Rashi, as explained by Be'er Mayim Chaim).

וישלח להם וישבו אתנו: וישמעו אל-חמור
 לה-כר-כה ואל-שכם בנו כל-יצאי שער עירו וימלו
 כל-זכר כל-יצאי שער עירו: ויהי ביום
 השלישי בהיותם כאבים ויקחו שני-
 בני-יעקב שמעון ולוי אחי דינה איש

24. וישמעו ... כל-יצאי שער עירו —
*All the people who depart [through]
 the gate of his city, listened.*

I.e., consented (*Onkelos*; see
Rashi to 37:28).

Radak to 23:10 interprets the ex-
 pression יצאי שער, *those who
 depart through the gate*, as syn-
 onymous with באי שער, *those who
 enter through the gate*, both idio-
 matically denoting the entire popu-
 lation of a city. He cites *Jeremiah*
 17:19 where the two expressions are
 interchanged.

However, the fact that the entire popu-
 lace consented to this strange and
 painful proposal in order to satisfy
 Shechem and his father calls for a
 special explanation.

R' Hirsch perceives a clue in the fact
 that the expression שער עירו, *those
 who depart through the gate of his city*,
 is used twice in our episode, instead of
 באי שער, *those who arrive through
 the gate of his city*, the more common
 expression for city residents. He ac-
 cordingly suggests that the expression used
 here seems to indicate that the inhabi-
 tants of Shechem's city were, for the
 greater part, peasants and farmers
 whose work took them daily out of the
 city. Chamor and Shechem were ap-
 parently the overlords of the district and
 the people — who regularly departed via
 the gate of the city — were perhaps their
 vassals and accustomed to harsh mea-
 sures; thus, *they listened*.

1. The *Midrash* relates that everyone who passed through the gates of Shechem was asked to be circumcised.

'Why?' asked one of the peasants.

'So that Shechem may marry Jacob's daughter,' they answered.

'Shechem is getting married and the peasant has to get circumcised!'

This became a proverb for a situation where one person suffers for another's decision.

Meshech Chochmah observes that in
 23:10 the expression *those who enter
 the city gate* included the womenfolk
 who had come to mourn Sarah, while
 here the subject is circumcision and the
 expression *who depart through the city
 gate* refers to the men who went out to
 trade. Women — especially in Eastern
 countries — stay at home. [See *Chizkuni*
 below.]

Tosafos HaRosh offers that the ex-
 pression used here refers only to those
 already in town at the time of the
 decree; while in 23:10 the inference is
 even to transient strangers.

— וימלו כל-זכר כל-יצאי שער עירו
*And all the males — all those who
 depart [through] the gates of the
 city — were circumcised.*

The stich implies that all the resi-
 dents of the city heard Shechem's
 proposal and wanted to flee from
 the decree of being circumcised
 against their will. But no male was
 allowed to leave the city unless he
 submitted to circumcision: *all the
 males — whoever wished to depart
 the gates of the city — had to submit
 to circumcision* (*Chizkuni*).¹¹

[The rendering of וימלו in the *niphal*,
 passive form: *was circumcised*, follows
Rashi and *Ibn Ezra* to 17:12.]

25. Simeon and Levi decimate She-
 chem.

— ויהי ביום השלישי בהיותם כאבים

²⁴ All the people who depart through the gate of his city listened to Chamor and his son Shechem, and all the males — all those who depart through the gates of the city — were circumcised.

²⁵ And it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and they

And it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain.

— Because the third day after circumcision is the most painful (*Ibn Ezra*).^[1]

In another sense, they waited until the third day since it took until then to circumcise all the males; by the third day, all of them were circumcised and in pain. Furthermore, the verse does not necessarily mean physical pain, but grief and regret over having submitted to the circumcision (*Daas Zekeinim*; *Chizkuni*).

Sefer HaYashar adds that their regret was inspired by the realization that for having undergone circumcision and apparently conversion, the neighboring heathen nations might attack them. Therefore, they decided that once their wounds would heal, they would avenge themselves upon Jacob and his family to regain their status among their fellow heathens and thereby negate the political effects of the circumcision. [See continuation of *Sefer HaYashar* at the end of this verse.]

שני בני יעקב שמעון וְלֵוִי — [That] two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi.

Why is it necessary to identify them as Jacob's sons? — Because in spite of being his sons, they did not seek his advice but acted on their own (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).

Radak observes that although all the sons consented to the scheme, as verse 13 implies, only two of the sons, Simeon and Levi, had the courage to carry out the plan.

[This differs markedly from *Ramban* ad. loc. who maintains that a wholesale massacre had never been the intention of Jacob, or of the brothers in acquiescing to the scheme. They had merely wanted to disable every able-bodied man, and remove Dinah from Shechem's house. Simeon and Levi alone wanted to avenge their wickedness violently, and for this Jacob did not forgive them even on his death-bed (see 49:6).]

וְאָחֵי דִּינָה — Dinah's brothers.

Were only Simeon and Levi her brothers, and not the others? — She is called by their name, however, because they risked their lives for her sake (*Midrash*).

1. The Sages [*Mishnah Shabbos* 86a] derive from the description in this passage of the third day after circumcision being one of great pain, that if there is no hot water available, one may heat water on the Sabbath to bathe a circumcised child on the third day after circumcision. *Yerushalmi Shabbos* 19:3 further clarifies that not just the wound itself, but the baby's entire body may be washed since the expression בְּהִיטָם כָּאֲבִים denotes that all their organs pained them.

Ramban (*Hilchos Shabbos* 2:14) explains that this permissive ruling takes into account that the third day after circumcision is when an infant's life was considered most endangered.

However, nowadays the *halachah* prohibits this, inasmuch as apparently the danger no longer exists, and since it is now not customary — even on weekdays — to bathe a circumcised child on the third day (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 331:9).

וּשְׁלַח לְדָכוּ חֲרָבוֹ וַיָּבֵאוּ עַל־הָעִיר בָּטָח וַיַּהֲרֹגוּ כָּל־
 כו זָכָר: וְאֶת־חֲמוּר וְאֶת־שָׁכֶם בְּנוֹ הָרֹגוּ
 לְפִי־חֶרֶב וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־דִּינָה מִבֵּית שָׁכֶם

Furthermore, this emphasizes that because they were children of the same mother, they felt the insult more acutely, hence the desire for revenge (*Ralbag*).

Each [man] – נִיקָחוּ ... אִישׁ חֲרָבוֹ took his sword.

The *Midrash* notes that Levi was thirteen years old at the time. [Simon and Levi were born – seven months apart – in the ninth year of Jacob's twenty year stay with Laban; making Levi eleven and a half years old when Jacob fled from Laban. Add the eighteen months of his journeying (*Rashi* 33:17) and we arrive at thirteen years for Levi, and thirteen and seven months (i.e., six months and several days – that is, the seventh month) for Simeon.] Thus, as *Lekach Tov* points out, it is implied in this Midrashic comment that whenever the Torah uses the term אִישׁ, man, it refers to an adult over thirteen years old. [Cf. *Rashi* to *Nazir* 29b s.v. וּרְבֵי יוֹסִי.]

And they came upon the city confidently. – וַיָּבֵאוּ עַל הָעִיר בָּטָח

Confidently – because the Shechemites were in pain [and in-

capacitated]. According to the *Midrash* they were confident because they relied on the strength of the 'old one' (*Rashi*).¹¹

Following the *Midrash* [see footnote], it was the physical strength of their old father, Jacob, that they relied on; while many commentators suggest that their confidence was centered on Jacob's spiritual merits.

Maharshal and *Kli Yakar* suggest that by the 'old one,' *Rashi* refers to Abraham, and their confidence was based on the anticipatory prayers Abraham had offered on their behalf when he had made Shechem his first stop in Canaan [over 180 years earlier!] [see *Rashi* to 12:6.]

Furthermore, *Kli Yakar*, continues, Jacob's sons were confident that the neighboring nations would not come to the Shechemites' aid, reasoning that the Shechemites had read themselves out of Canaanite society by circumcising themselves.¹²

Onkelos perceives that it is the city which is described as בָּטָח, secure; confident. The verse tells us that the brothers came upon the city which basked in a feeling of complete security.

Rashbam concurs, and adds that throughout Scripture בָּטָח, secure, refers to the residents of a city. *R'Hirsch* similarly renders: ... and come upon the

1. The *Midrash* records that although Jacob disapproved of his sons' action, nevertheless he recognized his responsibility to protect them against possible retaliation from vengeful Canaanites.

He took his sword and bow and stood at the entrance to Shechem and exclaimed: 'If the heathens come to attack my sons, I will fight them!' It was to this that Jacob alluded when he said of Shechem [48:22]: 'Which I seized from the hand of the Amorite with my bow and with my sword.'

Ramban (v. 13) cites a version of this *Midrash* [= *Midrash Vayisu*, in *Eisenstein Otzar Midrashim* p. 157; see *Rashi* to 48:22] that the surrounding nations actually waged three major wars against Jacob's family, and were it not for Jacob who donned his weapons, they would have been in mortal danger.

The Torah, however, does not elaborate about this because it was a hidden miracle, [i.e., a feat which one could erroneously attribute not to a miracle, but to Jacob's natural strength; see *comm.* to 11:28; 17:1; and further 33:5].

came upon the city confidently. They killed every male,²⁶ And Chamor and Shechem his son they killed at the point of the sword. Then they took Dinah from Shechem's house and left.

city which was resting trustfully.
Comp. Ezekiel 30:9.

וַיָּהָרוּ כָּל-זָכָר — [And] they killed every male.

The question of how the righteous sons of Jacob were justified in perpetrating such a massacre against the seemingly innocent townspeople of Shechem, and the question of collective guilt are discussed at length in the footnote to v. 13.

Chizkuni suggests that Simeon and Levi acted only after they heard of the insincere and devious manner in which Chamor and Shechem reported their proposal to the people of Shechem [v. 23]. Their duplicity made it clear that their circumcision was not sincere.

— It was clear that their primary motive in accepting the plan was to deprive Jacob and his sons of their property (*Sforno*).

According to *Sefer HaYashar*, Dinah had overheard a plot by Chamor's brother Chadakkum, and six other brothers — who had opposed the circumcision plan — to rise up and slay Jacob's family after the Shechemites had recovered from their wounds. Dinah sent word of this to her brothers, and they rose up in this pre-emptive strike, decimating the whole town, except for two young men who escaped and hid in some lime-pits. These two survivors rallied the surrounding na-

tions to attack Jacob's family, as noted in the footnote below.

26. וְאֶת חָמוֹר וְאֶת שָׁכֵם בְּנוֹ הָרָגוּ לְפָנָיו — And they killed Chamor and Shechem his son at the point of the sword.

— After finally locating them (*Sforno*).

It was only after they had killed every male in town — many of whom had been guarding the palace — that Simeon and Levi were able to slay Chamor and Shechem, who were then left unprotected (*Or HaChaim*).

וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת דִּינָה מִבֵּית שָׁכֵם וַיֵּצְאוּ — Then [lit. and] they took Dinah from Shechem's house and left [lit. and went out].

[Took is understood in the Midrashic sense of urging and persuading; comp. וַיִּקַּח in 2:15 and 12:5].

R' Huna said that she was overcome with shame and argued, 'where shall I go to bear my shame?' and refused to accompany them until Simeon agreed to marry her. He agreed and she became Simeon's Canaanite wife mentioned in 46:10, so-called because she had lived with a Canaanite (see *Rashi* and *Mizrachi* there. Cf. also *comm.* to 30:24 and to 37:5 and 38:2).

According to another opinion in

2. This, R' Yonasan Eybeschutz observes, was the reason Jacob's sons chose circumcision as the way to overcome the Shechemites; certainly, the valiant sons of Jacob could have overpowered them even were they not circumcised. However, Jacob's sons knew that had they attacked and defeated uncircumcised heathens, the nations would have clamored in protest. Once the Shechemites circumcised themselves and indentified as Jews, however, the brothers knew that the nations would disassociate themselves from the Shechemites because not a peep is heard when Jewish blood is spilled. This added to their confidence.

וישלה כו ויצאו בני יעקב באו על החללים ויבזו
 לדכו-כט כח העיר אשר טמאו אחותם: את-צאנם
 ואת-בקרם ואת-חמריהם ואת אשר-
 כט בעיר ואת-אשר בשדה לקחו: ואת-כל-
 חילם ואת-כל-טפם ואת-נשיהם שבו

the *Midrash* — and this is the opinion favored by *Ramban* to v. 12 — she lived in Simeon's house [not as his wife, but] shut up as a veritable widow. She went down with them to Egypt, and there she died. Simeon — or the children of Israel after the Exodus — compassionately brought her back to Canaan for burial. *Ramban* notes that her grave is in the city of Arbel near the grave of Nitai the Arbelite.

According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 38, Dinah had borne a daughter from Shechem's assault, whom she named Asenath. The brothers were opposed to keeping the child so that people would not speak of licentiousness in 'Jacob's tents.' To guarantee her safety, Jacob engraved HASHEM's Name on a metal plate, hung it on her neck, and left her in the field under a bush. Providence brought the child to the home of Potiphara, priest of On in Egypt, who was childless. He and his wife adopted her and Joseph later married her [41:45]. *Tosafos HaRosh* mentions that her name *Asenath* was in commemoration of her having been placed under the bush [סנה].

Another tradition recorded in *Bava Basra* 15a, maintains that Dinah married Job and had a most positive influence on him.

27. בני יעקב באו על החללים ויבזו
 העיר — *The sons of Jacob came*

upon the slain, and they plundered the city.

Upon the slain — i.e., to strip the corpses (*Rashi*).

[It is not clear from the text whether Simeon and Levi plundered the city *alone*, or whether at this point the other brothers joined in as well.]

According to *Targum Yonasan* (and this is the opinion followed by most commentators), the verse means that the *rest* of the brothers came while Simeon and Levi were departing with Dinah. *R' Hoffmann* offers that this accounts for the past perfect *באו*, lit. *had come*, for they came while Simeon and Levi were still there, but *after* the massacre had been completed. By the time they arrived, no Shechemites were left alive. Thus Scripture testifies that they had no hand in murder; they allowed themselves only to take spoils because of their outrage at Shechem's deed, and to act as a moral deterrent against similar violations in the future.

Or *HaChaim* maintains that *all* the brothers plundered the city since the property was rightfully theirs as *בשח*, *compensation for humiliation*. As *Rambam* notes in *Hilchos Naarah Besulah* chapt. 2, such payments must be assessed on the basis of the status of the man and the girl involved. Thus, considering Dinah's exalted status as

27-29 ²⁷ The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and they plundered the city which had defiled their sister.

²⁸ Their flocks, their herds, their donkeys, whatever was in the town and whatever was in the field, they took. ²⁹ All their wealth, all their children and wives they took captive and they plundered, as well as

Jacob's daughter, the brothers took everything for their father, for in the case of heathens, we do not apply the rule: *קִים לִיה בְּדִרְכָּהּ מִיָּנִי*, One is given only the more severe penalty, but is excused from the lesser one. Therefore, although the Shechemites suffered the supreme penalty of death, they remained culpable for all money payments arising out of the offense.

אֲשֶׁר טָמְאוּ אֲחֻתָּם — Which had defiled their sister.

The translation of the last stich follows Radak. Others render: because they [=the residents] had defiled their sister.

The verb *defiled* is in the plural. Thereby the Torah bears testimony that all the Shechemites were collectively guilty for Shechem's atrocity by allowing it to go unchecked, and by their subsequent insincerity. By their complicity, the Shechemites were guilty of kidnapping which comes under the category of the Noachide prohibition against robbery. Were this their only crime, Jacob's sons would not have reacted so extremely — it was the emotional outrage by Shechem's rape that caused their vengeful massacre. This also explains their taking of spoils as *בִּשְׁת*, compensation for the humiliation, as explained above (Ibn Caspi; Or HaChaim).

Additionally, all the townspeople shared responsibility because Shechem would never have committed

this evil had it not been tacitly approved by the citizens for the chief to take whomever he lusted after (Sforno).

28. *אֶת־צֹאֲנֵם וְאֶת־בָּקָרָם וְאֶת־חֲמִירֵיהֶם* — Their flocks [of small ungulates: sheep, goats, etc.], [and] their herds [large cattle], [and] their donkeys.

Thus by taking their property, Jacob's sons did to the Shechemites what the latter had planned to do to them [v. 23] (Abarbanel).

וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁר־בְּעִיר וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה לָקְחוּ — [And] whatever was in the town and whatever was in the field, they took.

— I.e., the stray and domesticated animals (Radak).

R' Hirsch explains this stich as further modifying the first part of the passage: *Their flocks, their herds, and their donkeys* — both those that were in the city and those that were in the field — they took.

29. *וְאֶת־כָּל־חֵילָם* — [And] All their wealth.

The translation *wealth* follows Rashi who cites this meaning of *חֵיל* [usually forces or strength] in Deut. 8:17; Numb. 19:18; Psalms 49:11.

וְאֶת־כָּל־טַפָּם וְאֶת־נְשֵׁיהֶם שְׁבוּ וְיָבוּ — [And] all their children and [their] wives, they took captive, and they plundered.

— To ensure that no one would remain there to foment retaliation by neighboring tribes (Abarbanel).

וַיִּבְזוּ וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית: וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב
 אֶל־שִׁמְעוֹן וְאֶל־לֵוִי עַכְרָתָם אֲתִי
 לְהַבְאִישְׁנִי בִישָׁב הָאָרֶץ בְּבִנְעִנִי וּבִפְרִי
 וְאֲנִי מִתִּי מִסָּפֵר וְנֹאסְפּוֹ עָלַי וְהַכּוֹנִי
 לֹא וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי: וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַכּוֹזְנֵה
 יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־אֲחֻתָּנוּ:

The translation of שבו as *they took captive* follows *Rashi* who observes that it is accented on the second syllable [and is the third person plural *kal* past tense of the root שבה, to capture. Were the accent on the first syllable, שְבוּ, it would have been the third person plural past tense of the root שוב, meaning *they returned*.]

וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית — As well as everything in the house.

I.e., the movable property (*Raddak*), in Shechem's or Chamor's house (*Ibn Ezra*).

The use of the definite article and singular *the* house indicates the house of the prime subjects of this narrative (*R' Hoffmann*).

30. וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־שִׁמְעוֹן וְאֶל־לֵוִי — [And] Jacob said to Simeon and to Levi.

[The double use of וְאֵל, and to, implies that he spoke to each of them as a mature individual, responsible for his own actions.]

Furthermore, only Simeon and Levi were castigated, for they committed murder. The other brothers took spoils as a form of recompense for the humiliation, and the taking of the women and children to avoid

repercussions. In the context of what had occurred *their* action was not regarded as evil; perhaps it was the only course they could take under the circumstances (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

עַכְרָתָם אֲתִי — You have discomposd me.

Compare the expression מִים עֲכֹרִים, troubled, unclear, waters. He meant: My mind is not clear. By their rash violence, Simeon and Levi had disturbed Jacob's composure and placed him in a potentially untenable position should the Canaanites go on the attack. Midrashically, Jacob's intent was: The barrel was clear, but you have made it turbid! (*Rashi*).¹¹

— You have clouded me. The family's reputation and honor had been crystal clear, but you have besmirched it (*R' Hirsch*).

לְהַבְאִישְׁנִי בִישָׁב הָאָרֶץ בְּבִנְעִנִי וּבִפְרִי — Making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and Perizzites.

The Canaanites will despise me and ostracize me, just as one distances himself from a despicable,

1. *Rashi* explains that the Canaanites had a tradition that they would fall by the hands of Jacob's progeny. But they thought that this would be deferred until Jacob's progeny would numerically increase, and then inherit the land [Exod. 23:30]. Consequently, the Canaanites had maintained their silence until now, not anticipating such an early attack on the part of Jacob's sons. 'Now that you have attacked them, however,' Jacob said, 'they will regard our conquest of Canaan as having begun, and they will band together in alliance against me and I shall be destroyed being so outnumbered.'

34 everything in the house.

30-31 ³⁰ Jacob said to Simeon and to Levi, 'You have discomposed me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and Perizzites. I am few in number and should they band together and attack me, I will be annihilated — I and my household.'

³¹ And they said, 'Should he treat our sister like a harlot?'

foul-smelling, putrid object (Radak).

You have given my reputation a foul smell. And just as you have been unjust, you have been unwise (R' Hirsch).

Sforno: They will say that we broke our word after they became circumcised.

[According to Rashi in the footnote: They will regard our conquest of the land as having prematurely begun, and though they have been confidently tranquil until now, they will henceforth take steps to counter us.]

[On the Canaanites and Perizzites, see above 13:7.]

[It is apparent from Jacob's remark, and from inferences in Ramban above, that once the Shechemites had undergone circumcision — which Jacob viewed as possibly signaling a sincere gesture — he was prepared to live among them for at least a while. It is equally clear, however, that he had no intention of permitting the Hivite Shechem — who had defiled Dinah — to marry her. Jacob wanted to incapacitate them enough to gain Dinah's release, and then come to terms with the city.]

וְאֲנִי מְעַט — [And] I am few in number [lit. and I am a numbered people].

— I.e., I have a meager force of

men (Rashi).

מִסְפָּר, number, idiomatically means: given to be numbered, hence few. The singular of מְעַט [people], מֵעַט, occurs only in names such as מְתוּשֶׁלַח, Methuselah (R' Hoffmann).

וְנִאָּסְפוּ עָלַי וְהִכּוּנִי — And should they band together and attack me.

— [To avenge the wrong. According to the Midrash cited in the footnote to v. 25, this indeed occurred.]

וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי — [And] I will be annihilated — I and my household.

[This would have been the case had not Jacob prevailed, and had God not cast His fear upon them (see on 35:5).]

[Note that the Patriarch's reproach refers to the dire consequence of his son's misbehavior, not to the iniquity of their acts of violence. See R' Hirsch in footnote to v. 31.]

31. וַיֹּאמְרוּ — And they said.

— To the contrary! The 'vessel' you referred to, [i.e., our honor] was made turbid [by Shechem's act], and we cleared it! (Midrash).

הַכּוֹנֵה יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־אֲחֹתִי — Should he treat our sister like a harlot?

Should he then have been permitted, unchecked and unpunished, to treat our sister like a harlot, like a loose woman who has no avenger? (Radak).

— She is not a harlot, and her

וישלה א ויאמר אלהים אל-יעקב קום עלה בית- להא אל ושב-שם ועשה-שם מזבח לאל

wrong must be avenged! We, as her brothers, had the obligation to avenge her (*Sforno*).

[We were not motivated by brutality, but by a desire to safeguard our honor, and our sister's honor, which must stand above every other consideration.]

Possibly, the sense of *יעשה* is not 'shall he treat,' but the indefinite 'shall one treat': What we did was to make ourselves feared so no one else would ever again dare to commit such a heinous crime against one of our women. Do you then want to keep Dinah and all Jewish daughters locked up in a chest forever, to protect them from the gaze of every lecher? [See on 32:23] (*Ralbag*).

— Is it right that people should say in the congregation of Israel that an uncircumcised idol worshiper defiled a daughter of Jacob and no one came to her aid? Or is it preferable that they hear that because Shechem boastfully abused our sister, treating her like a common harlot, that a whole city was destroyed because of her! (*Zohar; Targum Yonasan*).

Jacob's sons perceived from this experience that they would occasionally have to use force to defend the ideal of purity and honor (*Alshich*).^[1]

[The *ז* of *הַזֹּנֶה* is traditionally written large in some Torah Scrolls. I have been unable to find a reason for this. *Minchas Shay* cites the

1. *R' Hirsch* finds the entire motive of Simeon and Levi encapsulated in these few words. They were convinced that Shechem would not have dared act as he did were Dinah not a powerless alien, hopelessly outnumbered, Jewess. Precisely because it would continue to march through Canaan — and history — as a tiny nation, Israel had to wield the sword to demonstrate that its women would be protected by whatever necessary means. To do so, they did not care to act prudently; they wanted to be feared.

Had Simeon and Levi stopped at killing Shechem and Chamor, they would not have been blameworthy. But they punished relatively innocent people, and then they looted. For that there was no justification. [See, however, footnote to v. 13 for the justifications set forth by *Rambam* and *Ramban*.]

Jacob's death-bed speech to Simeon and Levi reflect this duality: the rightness of their motive, but the wrongness of their excessive means. He cursed their passion and deed, but he implicitly recognized the lofty nature of the spirit that moved them. By spreading them throughout the territory of the future Jewish nation, Jacob assured two things: 1) they would not possess the political and military power of decision; and 2) their uncompromising view of justice and national dignity would be disseminated throughout the nation.

Jacob's disapproval of their action was based primarily on the vulnerable position in which it placed the family. He *did* recognize the necessity for armed resistance when called for, but he insisted that each case must be judged individually in terms of its overall effects. Jews are moral and non-violent — not because they are weak, but because their greatest source of strength is the soul, not the sword.

Abarbanel [whose comment should perhaps be viewed from the background of his experience as the leader of Spanish Jewry under the Spanish Inquisition and Expulsion] writes that the act of the brothers demonstrates that there are times when it is worthwhile to risk lives in order to preserve Jewish self-respect. He continues that God apparently ratified their philosophy by causing the Canaanites to fear the family of Jacob.

Most commentators agree that Jacob did not condemn armed resistance *per se*, but insisted that each instance must be calmly and dispassionately evaluated. Although Simeon and Levi can be defended, their course cannot be regarded as a precedent regulating Jewish conduct throughout history.

custom but notes that it is not universal.]

Rashi comments on the phrase אָחוּתוֹת אַח by simply quoting *Onkelos'* Aramaic translation: *our sister* without further elaboration.

R' Bachya struggles with this, and notes that he fails to grasp what *Rashi* intended in citing the literal translation of an unambiguous word. The commentators provide several possible solutions. *Tosafos HaRosh* suggests that *Rashi* intended to point out that אַח should be translated as the accusative article הַ and not as עִם, with, which would, as *Minchas Yitzchak* notes, imply consent on her part, as if she too, acted the harlot role.

Heidenheim suggests, on the basis of printed texts, that there are three extant versions of *Onkelos'* translation of this phrase: a) אָחוּתָא; b) וְחֵצֵר לְאָחוּתָא; c) יַעֲבִיד לְאָחוּתָא, and that *Rashi* wished merely to establish the former as the correct one.

By saying like a harlot — but not

an actual harlot — they emphasized their belief that Dinah had not consented (*Lekach Tov*).

Ibn Caspi maintains that this could also be why in this verse the word אָחוּתוֹת, *our sister*, is traditionally written 'full' (with a 1) in contrast with the way it is written in verses 13 and 14. For, as the episode draws to a close, the brothers make a point of saying that Dinah remained 'fully' worthy of being their sister.

Jacob does not agree with his sons' contention that their extreme violence was justified, but he maintains his silence; stifling his outrage until he curses their anger on his death bed [49:6] (*R' Hoffmann*).

XXXV

1. Jacob journeys to Bethel.

קום עֲלֵה בֵּית־אֵל — *Arise — go up to Bethel.*

Nearly twenty-two years earlier, Jacob had vowed that Bethel would be the site of God's house [28:22]. The command that he now return there was to imply that Jacob must fulfill the vow without delay;

because he had not done so sooner, he was punished by the abduction of Dinah (*Rashi*; *Radak*; see footnote to 34:1).¹¹

Cf. *Deut. 23:22*: *When you make a vow to HASHEM your God, do not delay fulfilling it, for HASHEM your God will call you to account, and you will have incurred guilt.*

Bethel is geographically on higher

1. Jacob was held accountable only for his delay in fulfilling the vow on the way home, but not for leaving the vow unfulfilled during the years he spent in Laban's house, since the vow was to take effect only after he began his homeward journey — *If I return safely, etc.* [28:21]. Thus, he was blamed only for settling in Succoth, instead of going directly to Bethel and then to his father.

Earlier [32:23], *Rashi* cites only the *Midrash* that Jacob was punished with Dinah's abduction for having withheld Dinah from Esau, but makes no mention that Dinah's abduction was also in punishment for having delayed the fulfillment of his vow. *Gur Aryeh* explains that the sin of procrastination caused God to 'open Jacob's ledger,' as it were, and determine whether he was deserving of punishment. Then, his sin of withholding Dinah was brought to account. Had he fulfilled his vow, the sin of hiding Dinah could have been held in abeyance; meanwhile, Jacob could have atoned for it with repentance and prayer.

Chizkuni and *Mizrachi* explain that his detour to Succoth and the resultant delay in going to Bethel was brought about by Jacob's failure to let Esau marry Dinah. Otherwise, he would have proceeded directly to Bethel. Thus, he was punished for his procrastination.

וּשְׁלַח הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו בְּרָחֶק מִפְּנֵי עֲשׂוֹ אָחִיו:
 לֵה/ב וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶל כָּל-אֲשֶׁר
 עִמּוֹ הָסְרוּ אֶת-אֱלֹהֵי הַנֹּכַר אֲשֶׁר

terrain than Shechem; hence the term *go up* (Abarbanel).

Interestingly, Abraham's route had also taken him from Shechem to Bethel. See 12:8 (Hoffmann).

Basing themselves on the *Midrash* to 28:17-19 that Mount Moriah in Jerusalem had miraculously been moved to Luz/Bethel at the time of Jacob's vision, many commentators explain the implication here, too, that Jacob was to *go up* to Jerusalem.

וְשָׁבָם – And remain [or: settle] there.

Ramban confesses that he does not know the significance of the command *and remain there*. He conjectures that God commanded him to remain there to enable him to purify his camp from the *טִמְאָה*, defilement, of idols that had been taken from Shechem or from the defilement the people had incurred by touching corpses. This was similar to the seven-day waiting period outside the camp that was required of the soldiers who returned from the war against the Midianites [Numb. 31:19]. Following this, Jacob would make the altar. Alternatively, he was to dwell there for a time before he set up the altar so that his mind could be attuned spiritually to the service of God.¹¹

Sforno echoes the latter view, and

cites how the pious ones of old used to wait an hour before praying in order that they might focus their thoughts upon their Father in Heaven [Mishnah Berachos 5:1].

Possibly the intent was that Jacob and his family become imbued with the spirit which is associated with Bethel and his experience there (R' Hirsch).

The command could also mean: Wait there – for the Divine Manifestation (R' Munk).

Another implication of *and remain there* is: Do not be concerned with the fact that the Canaanites dwell there; remain there and do not fear them (Or HaChaim).

The phrase *remain there* does not imply that Jacob was to settle there *permanently*, for in fact he remained there but a short time. The literal intent is that Jacob should go to Bethel and stay there as long as necessary to prepare himself spiritually, and practically, for fulfilling his vow and making an altar (Hoffmann).

וַעֲשֵׂה-זֶבֶחַ – And make an altar there.

After making the necessary spiritual preparations, *make an altar there* (Ramban).

There is an opinion cited in *Chumash Rav Peninim* that Jacob had delayed his vow since he was unsure *where* he was to build the altar. According to the

1. According to the various Rabbinic chronologies, Jacob spent a total of six months in Bethel sacrificing burnt offerings. [Included in that six-month period was the time he spent in Shechem (Vilna Gaon).]

Thus, the total duration of Jacob's journey from Paddan Aram to Isaac was two years, and the total time away from his father's service was thirty-six years: fourteen in the Academy of Eber; twenty in Laban's service; eighteen months in Succoth; and six months in Bethel and Shechem. Jacob was held accountable only for the last twenty-two years. His punishment was that Joseph was later absent from him for a like amount of time (*Seder Olam*; *Megillah* 17a; see Rashi further 37:33).

Who appeared to you when you fled from Esau your brother.' ² So Jacob said to his household and to all those who were with him, 'Discard the alien gods

Midrash [see *comm.* to 28:17] Mount Moriah had temporarily moved to Bethel/Luz where Jacob made his vow. Now that Mount Moriah had returned to its location in Jerusalem, Jacob waited for God to tell him whether his vow to build an altar should be fulfilled in Bethel or on Mount Moriah. [Most maintain, however, that Jacob was now in Jerusalem, on Mount Moriah.]

[This altar is perceived by many commentators to be in addition to the vow of 28:22. That vow was fulfilled by the reconsecration of the pillar in v. 14.]

לֹאֵל הַנִּרְאָה אֵלַי בְּכַרְחָךְ מִפְּנֵי עֲשׂוֹ
אָחִיךָ – *To [the] God Who appeared to you when you fled from [the presence of] Esau your brother.*

As a thanksgiving to God for having fulfilled the promise He made to you there to protect you [28:15ff]. This is akin to the Sages' declaration [*Berachos* 54a] that whenever one passes a place where he was miraculously saved from impending tragedy he must utter the benediction *Blessed be He Who performed a miracle for me in this place* (*Sforno*).

This was a reminder to Jacob that when he was alone, fleeing from his brother [27:43], God had appeared to him and gave him assurances of safety [28:10-15]. God had fulfilled His promise, and now it was Jacob's obligation to reciprocate by fulfilling his vow of 28:22 (*Radak*).

The Name *El*, as explained by *Gur Aryeh* to *Exodus* 34:6, indicates a boundless degree of Divine mercy, an outpouring far surpassing that indicated by the Name *HASHEM*.

Why does God refer to Himself in

third person – לֹאֵל, *to the God* – rather than in first person – לִי, *to Me*?

Radak answers that it was not God Himself Who spoke to Jacob, but through an angel speaking in His Name. The angel reverently referred to God in third person. Such angelic communications are common in Scripture.

2. אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶל כָּל אֲשֶׁר עִמּוֹ – *To his house[hold] and to all those who were with him.*

בֵּיתוֹ, *his household*, is variously interpreted as referring to his wives (*Abarbanel*) or his sons (*Radak*).

The *Midrash* interprets all *those who were with him* to refer to converts whom Jacob had brought under the wings of the *Shechinah*.

Sefer Chassidim [Parma ed.] par. 81765 cites this passage to teach that one should reprove the members of his own household first, and then reprove others.

– הִסְרוּ אֶת-אֱלֹהֵי הַנֹּכְרִים אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכְכֶם – *Discard [or: remove] the alien gods [lit. gods of the foreigner] that are in your midst.*

– i.e., remove from your possession the idols you have taken from the spoils of Shechem (*Rashi*).

The term *אֱלֹהֵי הַנֹּכְרִים*, *gods of the foreigner*, refers to idols worshiped by foreign peoples (*Rabba*).

R' Hirsch perceives *הַנֹּכְרִים* as an abstract noun and renders: *gods of 'strangeness.'* It refers to any characteristics that are foreign to Jews; foreign lands in contrast to the Jewish land, and the gentile character in contrast to Jewry and Judaism.

[Comp. *Rashi* and *Ibn Ezra* to *Deut.* 32:12.]

וּשְׁלַח לְהַגִּיד בְּתַכְכֶּם וְהִטְהַרְוּ וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שְׂמֹלֵתֵיכֶם: וְנִקְוָמָה וְנַעֲלָה בֵּית־אֵל וְאַעֲשֵׂה־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לֹאֵל הָעֵנָה אֲתִי בְיוֹם צָרְתִּי וַיְהִי עִמָּדִי בַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הִלְכְּתִי: וַיִּתְּנוּ אֵל-יַעֲקֹב אֶת כָּל-אֱלֹהֵי הַנָּכַר אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדָם וְאֶת־הַנִּזְמוֹת אֲשֶׁר בְּאֲזִניהֶם וַיִּטְּמוּ אֹתָם

The spoils included silver and gold jewelry engraved with figures that were worshipped as gods. Jacob's household members took them *only* to wear and display, but not for worship. Nevertheless Jacob wanted them to derive no benefit whatever from articles that had been used as idols, but to separate themselves as much as possible from such matters. Similarly, the Torah commanded [Deut. 7:25]: *You shall not desire the silver and gold on them, and [ibid. 13:18] nothing of that which was consigned to condemnation shall remain in your hand (Radak).*

Furthermore, Jacob wanted that their later service HASHEM not even appear idolatrous in any way (*Chizkuni*).

R' Hoffmann includes in the category of *alien gods* the *teraphim* which Rachel had stolen from her father [see 31:19], as well as other idolatrous artifacts that his servants might still have had in their possession from Aram Naharaim, a place of idol-worship. Cf. *Josh. 24:14*.

וְהִטְהַרְוּ — [And] *cleans* yourselves.

— [Spiritually] from idolatry (*Rashi*), since idolatry contaminates (*Radak*).

— By bathing your bodies (*Ibn Ezra*).^[1]

וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שְׂמֹלֵתֵיכֶם — *And change your clothes.*

— Lest you [inadvertantly] (*Yafeh*

Toar)] have in your possession a garment that had been used in idolatrous worship (*Rashi*).

— Clothes which have become contaminated along with you, or those clothes which you took off the corpses or from their houses (*Radak*).

R' Hirsch notes the analogy with the order given by Moses before the Revelation at Sinai: *he sanctified the people and they washed their garments [Exodus 19:14].* For the family of Jacob, the ascent to Bethel where God had revealed Himself to the Patriarch had the same significance as the assembly at Mount Sinai for his descendants.

From this verse we learn that when one goes to pray in a place dedicated for prayer, he must be clean in body and in clothing (*Ibn Ezra*).

וְנִקְוָמָה וְנַעֲלָה בֵּית־אֵל וְאַעֲשֵׂה־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ — *Then come, let us go up to Bethel [lit. and we shall rise and we shall go up to Bethel]; [and] I will make there an altar.*

Then, in this cleansed state, we can proceed to Bethel and serve God (*R' Bachya*).

'Though we will go up to Bethel,

1. Thus we see that whoever separates himself from idolatry must cleanse himself (see *S'mag* 4:240); this is the reason a convert must undergo immersion (*Torah Temimah*).

Rambam [*Avos HaTum'ah* 6:1] observes that although contamination caused by idolatry is a Soferic enactment, nevertheless we see a Scriptural allusion to it in our verse. [Cf. however *Shabbos* 82b where our verse is not cited.]

that are in your midst; cleanse yourselves and change your clothes. ³ Then come, let us go up to Bethel; I will make there an altar to God Who answered me in my time of distress, and was with me on the road that I have traveled.' ⁴ So they gave to Jacob all the alien gods that were in their possession, as well as the rings that were in their ears, and Jacob buried them un-

it is I who will build an altar.' Jacob excluded his children from the task of building the altar because they came into the world only after his oath and after he suffered the affliction ... Only the one for whom the miracle occurred must render thanks; only he who eats bread at the table must say Grace, not another who has eaten nothing (Zohar).

לֹא לֵאלֹהֵי הַיּוֹם אֶתִּי יָצָחִי — To [the] God Who answered [lit. answers] me in my time [lit. day] of distress.

— When I fled from Esau (Abarbanel; cf. v. 2).

— Throughout my every dilemma (Akeidas Yitzchak).¹¹

In relating God's command to his household, Jacob does not say that God commanded him directly nor does he use God's own description of Himself in verse 1 as 'the God Who appeared to me when I was fleeing from Esau my brother.' It would have seemed pretentious to say that God had appeared to him, and that the mention of his flight from Esau would have sounded incongruous in view of their public

display of peaceful reconciliation (Alshich; Abarbanel).

וַיְהִי עִמִּי בַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הִלְכִיתִי — And was with me on the road that I have traveled.

[As He promised me in 28:15.]

4. אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדָם — That were in their possession [the Hebrew is idiomatically singular: that were in their 'hand'].

— [I.e. the idols] in their possession from the artifacts they had taken from the house of idolatry of Shechem (Targum Yonasan).

וְאֵת הַנְּזָמִים אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנוֹתָם — As well as the rings that were in their ears.

I.e., the ears of the idols (Chizkuni).

According to Targum Yonasan: '... that had been in the ears of the inhabitants of Shechem.' The rings too, were used for idol worship as amulets. They contained images within them (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer).

The connection between rings and idolatry is obscure. That the Golden Calf and the ephod made by Gideon were both made from such

1. Jacob had been commanded in verse 1 to erect an altar to God Who had appeared to him when he fled from Esau, but Jacob wants to pay homage to God not only for the kindnesses of the past, but also for those of the present. And so he uses the present tense, saying: God, הַיּוֹם אֶתִּי יָצָחִי, Who answers me in the day of my distress. Jacob experiences Divine salvation as an uninterrupted, continuing reality. Even at the end of his life, he used the present tense to invoke the angel who saves me from all harm [הַמַּלְאַךְ הַגָּאֵל אִתִּי] (48:16). For Jacob, Divine Providence is always present, always near to man, always merciful. Divine love is infinite and inexhaustible, it knows neither past nor future, but only the eternal present (R' Munk).

וישלח לה/ה-ז
 ה יעקב תחת האלה אשר עם שכם: ויסעו
 ויהי | תחת אלהים על-הערים אשר
 סביבותיהם ולא רדפו אחרי בני יעקב:
 ו יבא יעקב לזוה אשר בארץ כנען הוא
 ו בית-אל הוא וכל-העם אשר-עמו: ויבן

jewelry throws little light on the matter ... It is worth noting that the Aramaic word for נְזָמִים, earrings, is קְרָשָׁא [comp. root קרש, holy] (R' Hirsch).

— ויטמן ... תחת האלה אשר עם שכם — And Jacob buried [lit. hid] them underneath the terebinth near [lit. that was with, i.e., in the proximity of (Rashi)] Shechem.¹¹

— In a location which will neither be tilled nor sown (Ramban).

— So that others should not come upon them and be led astray (Radak).

§ Since the law requires that idols be pulverized and scattered in the wind, or sunk in the sea where they will be forever inaccessible [Avodah Zarah 43b], why did Jacob merely bury these idols?

It appears that Jacob's sons did not take the idols or appurtenances until the Shechemites had renounced them as idols, thus making their use permissible to them. For, as we learn [ibid. 52b], a heathen can nullify an idol against its worshiper's will. That Jacob still ordered them to rid themselves of these idols, bathe themselves and change their clothes, was an extra-halachic act of piety to add to their spiritual purity in preparation for their service of HASHEM. Accordingly, burial in this case was sufficient, since the idols were

legally permissible, and Jacob's intention was merely to hide them (Ramban).

Another reason Jacob buried the idols there rather than take the time to pulverize them or seek a body of water in which to sink them, was not to delay his execution of God's command to fulfill his vow (Nachalas Yitzchak).

Furthermore, Jacob was afraid that were he to remain there longer to pulverize or burn the idols, the surrounding nations would angrily note the desecration of their gods. Therefore, he took the most expeditious course open to him under the circumstances (R' Bachya).

According to Midrash HaGadol, the terror mentioned in the next verse was in consequence of Jacob's act recorded here. The inhabitants of the neighboring cities saw Jacob's mighty feat in picking up the terebinth with his hand, hiding the idols beneath it, and replanting it. The terror of God fell upon them.

אלה is defined by Rashi as 'a kind of tree that bears no fruit.'

Jacob purposely chose such a barren tree under which to bury them; he would not choose a fruit tree lest its fruit-bearing qualities be adversely affected (Alshich).

The familiar translation terebinth or turpentine tree follows Onkelos who renders it בוטקא, Pistacia terebinthus, which is one of the tallest species of trees in Eretz Yisrael.

[Rashi in Joshua 24:26 mentions a tradition that the terebinth mentioned there is the very tree of our verse.]

1. According to several Talmudic sources, Jacob buried these idols — one of which was in the form of a dove — on Mount Gerizim near Shechem. That the Samaritans revere Mount Gerizim as holy is perceived by R' Yishmael ben R' Yose [Yer. Avodah Zarah 5:4] to be not because of the mountain, but because of the idols Jacob buried beneath it.

As noted in Chullin 6a [see Tosaf. ad. loc. s.v. בראש] many centuries later the Samaritans found this dove-idol at the top of Mount Gerizim where they built their temple, and venerated it (see Daas Zekeinim).

derneath the terebinth near Shechem. ⁵ They set out, and there fell a Godly terror on the cities which were around them, so that they did not pursue Jacob's sons.

⁶ Thus Jacob came to Luz in the land of Canaan — which is Bethel — he, and all the people who were

5. וַיֵּצְאוּ — And they set out [lit. and they traveled].

וַיְהִי חֶמֶת אֱלֹהִים עַל הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר סָבִיבוֹתֵיהֶם — And there fell [lit. was] a Godly terror on the cities which were around them.

— A Godly terror was inspired by the military prowess displayed by Jacob and his sons. For, as noted above [footnote to 34:25], the surrounding nations had waged three major wars against them, and were it not for Jacob who took up his weapons, they would have been in mortal danger (*Midrash Vayisau*). [See *Rashi* to 48:22.]

Because it was a hidden miracle, however, the Torah did not describe it, referring to it only by allusion in 48:22 and with the passing reference here. [I.e., it was a miracle which man can deny, attributing it to the great natural strength of Jacob and his sons; thus it could appear that their own might saved them.] The Torah is similarly silent regarding Esau's wars with the Horites [see 36:20] (*Ramban* to 34:13).

According to *Midrash Rabbah*, these nations assembled at Chatzor to wage war, but as noted, they were divinely prevented from doing so. For this reason, Joshua burned only Chatzor of all the cities in *Eretz Yisrael* that stood intact after his conquest, (*Joshua* 11:13). This was Chatzor's punishment, for a tradition had been divinely revealed to Moses who in turn transmitted it to Joshua, that it was at Chatzor

that they assembled.

וְלֹא רָדְפוּ אַחֲרֵי בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב — So that [lit. and] they did not pursue [after] Jacob's sons.

For had God not caused His terror to be upon the Canaanites, they would have fallen upon Jacob's family 'like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance' (*Ramban* to 34:13).

The expression implies that they still bore hatred, but would not dare pursue them (*Ran*).

6. לִזְוֹה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן הוּא בֵּית-אֵל — To Luz in the land of Canaan — which is Bethel.

These many descriptions of the site intimate that there was another Luz, not in Canaan and not identified with Bethel (*Chizkuni*). [See *comm.* to 28:19 for the various views on the location of Luz/Bethel.]

It was only now, with his entry into Luz, in the Land of Canaan the land of his fathers, that Jacob's journey could be considered as having ended safely: that is, Bethel — the holy site which Jacob had sanctified as a 'House of God' when he had departed from the land. God had fulfilled His promises, and now Jacob, having been returned safely to his ancestral home, was prepared to fulfill his vow (*Hoffmann*).

וְהוּא וְכָל-הָעָם אֲשֶׁר עִמּוֹ — He, and all the people who were with him.

— This passage informs us that as

וּשְׁלַח
לְהָח
שֵׁם מִזֶּבֶחַ וַיִּקְרָא לְמָקוֹם אֵל בֵּית־אֵל כִּי
שֵׁם נִגְלוּ אֵלָיו הָאֱלֹהִים בְּבָרְחוֹ מִפְּנֵי
ח אָחִיו: וַתֵּת דְּבָרָה מִיָּנֶקֶת רַבָּקָה

a result of the aforementioned *Godly terror* upon the surrounding cities, not one man among Jacob's household or servants was lost in warfare [for all his people were with him] (*Ramban* to 34:13); nor did any of them die in Shechem or on the journey (*Radak*).

7. וַיִּבֶן שֵׁם מִזֶּבֶחַ — *And he built an altar there.*

— On the site where God had revealed Himself to Jacob on his way to Charan; where he had envisioned the angels ascending and descending [28:12-13]; and where he had erected a pillar [28:18] (*Hoffmann*).

Most commentators interpret that the construction of this altar was in specific compliance with God's command in v. 1. Jacob's vow in 28:22, however, was accomplished only later, when he rededicated the pillar [v. 14].

וַיִּקְרָא לְמָקוֹם אֵל בֵּית־אֵל — *And [he] named the place El Bethel.*⁽¹⁾

The phrase is interpreted as if it read *וְאֵל בְּבֵית־אֵל*, the *Holy One, Blessed be He, is in Bethel* (the prepositional prefix בְּ, *in*, being implied); He makes His Divine Presence manifest in Bethel. Other passages where the preposition בְּ, *in*, is implied are: *II Sam.* 9:4 = בֵּית מְכִיר = בית מְכִיר; above 24:13 = בְּבֵית אֲבִיךָ = בבית אביך (*Rashi*).

Jacob had already given it the name *Bethel* in 28:19. He now ad-

ded the name *El* — an act which had a significance similar to his naming of the altar in Shechem as *El Elohei Yisrael* in 33:20 [i.e., to commemorate the fact that God wrought miracles for him there; see *comm.* there] (*Radak*).

— Jacob thereby intimated that by appearing to him now, God associated His Presence with the site he had named Bethel nearly twenty-two years earlier (*Or HaChaim*).

As *Rashi* explains it, the sense is that Jacob proclaimed to all regarding that place: 'God is in Bethel' (*Abarbanel*).

Rashi to *Exod.* 34:6 cites the *Mechilta* that God's Name *El* depicts Him in His attribute as Dispenser of Divine Mercy [as distinct from *Elohim* which depicts Him as Dispenser of Strict Justice.] See *comm.* end of v. 1.

כִּי שֵׁם נִגְלוּ אֵלָיו הָאֱלֹהִים — *For it was there that [the] God* [i.e. in His Aspect of Judge and Lord (*Rashi*); *R' Hirsch* renders: *the Divine relationship*] *had been revealed to him.*

— This is the specific reason for the altar: it commemorated God's appearance to him. The fulfillment of his vow, however, was accomplished with the rededication of the pillar in v. 14 (*Radak*).

[The verb *נִגְלוּ*, *had been revealed*, is in the plural; while *Elohim* is usually followed by a singular verb, e.g. *בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים*, *God created*.]

Rashi accordingly notes that Hebrew nouns denoting power or

1. When Abraham and Isaac built altars, Scripture specifies that they *proclaimed God's Name* [e.g., 12:8; 26:24]. This mention is unnecessary in the case of Jacob because of his large family and abundant retinue, all of whom served God. Furthermore, God's Name had already been made known by Abraham and Isaac (*Tur* to 13:8).

with him.⁷ And he built an altar there and named the place El Bethel, for it was there that God had been revealed to him during his flight from his brother.

⁸ Deborah, the wet-nurse of Rebecca, died, and she

lordship are often plural, for example 39:20: אֲדוֹנֵי יוֹסֵף [= אֲדוֹנֵי יוֹסֵף], *Joseph's master*; Exodus 22:14: If its owner [בְּעָלָיו] is with it. Similarly, God's Name *Elohim* which describes Him as Judge and Master, occurs in the plural [and may take a plural verb, as in our verse.] But no other Divine Name [e.g., ה', שְׁמִי] ever occurs in the plural.

This follows the Sages, [*Sanhedrin* 38b] who perceived God Himself to be the subject, and the plural verb as merely an idiomatic form. They cite this as one of the verses which prove that 'In all the passages that the heretics have misinterpreted as grounds for their heresy, their refutation is found near at hand. It says (in the plural) *that God had been revealed to him*, while in verse 3 Jacob specifically said that he was building the altar to the God Who answered (in the singular) *me in my distress*.' Thus it is clear from verse 3 that there was never a thought of a plurality of gods. [Comp. footnote to 1:26.]

Onkelos who interprets the sense of the phrase renders it in the singular: For it was there that אֲתִגְלִי לָהּ, *God appeared* [singular] to him; while *Targum Yonasan* takes the plural to refer to the angels whom Jacob envisioned climbing the ladder [28:12] and renders accordingly: אֲתִגְלִיאוּ לָהּ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים, *that the angels of God had appeared to him*.

בְּקִרְחוֹ מִפְּנֵי אָחִיו — *During his flight from [the presence of] his brother.*

8. The death of Rebecca and Deborah.

This verse interrupts the flow of verse 7 which speaks of Jacob having built an altar in Bethel, and verse 9 which continues with God's blessing which was given at that time in Bethel. As the Sages taught, we are now informed not merely of *Deborah's* death, but of *Rebecca's* as well. The blessing of verse 9 came to comfort Jacob on his bereavement upon the loss of his mother (*Ramban*).

וַתָּמָת רֵבְכָה מִיִּנְקֶתָהּ רַבֵּקָה — [And] *Deborah the wet-nurse of Rebecca died.*

Deborah was the same nurse who had accompanied Rebecca when, as a young girl, she came to marry Isaac. (See 24:59). She is identified as *Rebecca's wet-nurse*, because her name had not been mentioned earlier (*Lekach Tov*).

What was she now doing in Jacob's house? — Rebecca had promised Jacob that she would summon him from Laban's house when it was safe for him to return [27:45]. Accordingly she sent Deborah for him in fulfillment of her promise, but the aged nurse died on the [homeward] journey (*Rashi* citing *R' Moshe HaDarshan*).¹¹

Ramban disagrees with *R' Moshe HaDarshan's* view, suggesting that it is highly unlikely that Rebecca

1. [It is not clear when Rebecca dispatched Deborah to summon Jacob, and whether or not Jacob left immediately upon Deborah's arrival. Obviously, had Jacob left as soon as Rebecca summoned him, it is difficult to understand why he was punished for staying away from his parents — he stayed away only in obedience to their orders!]

We might conjecture that Deborah had been sent to him many years earlier, soon after his

וּתְקַבֵּר מִתַּחַת לְבֵית-אֵל תַּחַת הָאֵלֹן וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ אֵלֹן בְּכוֹת:

וישלח
לה/ח

would have dispatched an old lady on such a strenuous mission. Instead *Ramban* offers that after accompanying Rebecca to Canaan, Deborah had returned to Paddan Aram. She was now accompanying Jacob home to visit Rebecca. Conceivably, Deborah resided with Jacob in order to care for his children, in deference to Rebecca. Possibly the wet-nurse was different from the wet-nurse mentioned in 24:59, since it was customary for notables to have many nurses. This nurse, Deborah, had remained behind with Laban, and now Jacob was taking her home with him to look after his mother in her old age. Deborah's death was mentioned, as we shall see, because our verse contains a veiled hint at the death of Rebecca herself.

וּתְקַבֵּר מִתַּחַת לְבֵית-אֵל — And she was buried below Bethel.

— The city lay at the top of a hill and she was buried at the foot of this hill (*Rashi*).

תַּחַת הָאֵלֹן — Below the plateau [or: the plain].

As *Onkelos* renders: On the lower part of the plain. There was a plateau high on the slope of the hill, and she was buried beneath it. [The word אֵלֹן does not mean plateau or plain (*Mizrachi*), rather] this particular plateau in Bethel bore the name 'Alon' (*Rashi*).

Rashi's interpretation of Alon as a place-name is in consonance with *Rashi's* exegesis to 14:6.

arrival in Paddan Aram, and he did not return with her, thus making him accountable for his extended absence. Indeed, such a view was cited above in the footnote to 30:25. For this reason, we must assume that Deborah died on the journey back to Canaan; that would allow for the chronology that she came much earlier but that Jacob did not return home when summoned.]

Cf. *Ramban* to 14:6 who disagrees with *Rashi's* view that Alon is a proper noun since the word Alon is preceded by the definite article ה, and a definite article is never attached to a proper noun. He maintains, rather, that alon is a species of tree — the oak as in *Isaiah* 6:13: כָּאֵלֶּה וְכָאֵלֹן, Like the terebinth and like the oak. In translating it plain — called Alon because it was a place containing many oaks — *Onkelos* was conveying the sense of the verse rather than a literal translation of alon.

Radak draws a distinction between אֵלֹן [Ailon], generally translated by *Onkelos* as plain, and אֵלֹן [Alon] in our verse which *Targum Yerushalmi* treats as a different word meaning oak tree in Aramaic.

See also *Mizrachi* to 14:6 who observes from the fact that *Targum Onkelos* and *Yerushalmi* disagree as to the meaning of the terms, we must assume that there were two traditions regarding it, and each *Targum* preserved the tradition he had received from his teacher.

וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ אֵלֹן בְּכוֹת — And he named it Alon Bachuth.

According to *Onkelos*, the name is translated as the Plain of Weeping; while according to *Rashi*, who renders Alon as the name of a particular plateau, it is 'Alon' of Weeping. *Targum Yerushalmi*, *Radak* and *Ramban* render: 'Oak' of Weeping. According to *Ramban's* interpretation of *Onkelos*: 'Grove' of Weeping.

Rashi cites the *Midrash* that in this verse we have a veiled hint of the death of Rebecca herself for, as the Sages taught, while Jacob was there he was informed that his mother had died. In Greek alon means another. [Accordingly, the

name *Alon Bachuth* would denote: *Another Weeping*, i.e. *weeping for another* (his mother) as well as for Deborah.¹¹

Ramban discusses the Midrashic tradition that this verse alludes also to Rebecca's death, as implied by the name *Alon Bachuth*, Oak of Weeping, which the Midrash perceives to mean *double weeping* [interpreting the word *בכות* as if it were the plural *בכות*] — one for Deborah, and the other for Rebecca.

Ramban corroborates this interpretation by observing that it is inconceivable that the grief and weeping solely for the passing of the old wet-nurse could have been of such proportions as to inspire Jacob to name the place after it. Furthermore, it says below [v. 27] that *Jacob came to Isaac his father*. Had Rebecca still been alive, she too would have been mentioned since it was she who advised Jacob to go to Paddan Aram and was the cause of all the good which happened to him there; Isaac had merely acted on her advice [see 27:43 ff.]. Hence we assume, with Tradition, that this excessive weeping must have been occasioned by Jacob's grief at hearing the news — while attending to

the burial of Deborah (*Tanchuma*) — of the death of his righteous mother, who loved him, and who was not privileged to see him when he returned home. This accounts for the name, and for God's appearance in order to bless him, and to comfort him as we shall learn in the next verse.

¶ Certainly Rebecca's death is a significant event in itself. Why is it merely alluded to and not explicitly stated?

— The time of Rebecca's death was kept secret so that people might not curse her as the mother who gave birth to Esau — and therefore the Torah does not mention it (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).¹²

Ramban cites *Rashi's* Midrashic interpretation and notes that the mere fact that Rebecca's death goes unmentioned is, in itself, not remarkable — many deaths, such as Leah's, are not mentioned! The point is, rather, that her death is suggested by allusion — if so, why is it revealed only in this veiled manner and not explicitly? Furthermore, *Rashi's* argument that the Torah wanted to avoid curses of Rebecca as the 'mother of Esau' is not strong since Esau is mentioned in connection with

1. Cf. *Sefer HaYashar*: Jacob, his sons, and all his people arose and went to Bethel in obedience to God. Jacob was then ninety-nine years of age. They stayed in Bethel for six months, during which time Deborah, the daughter of Uz and the wet-nurse of Rebecca, who was with Jacob's party, died. Jacob buried her below Bethel under an oak that was there.

At about the same time, there died in Hebron, which is Kiryath Arba, Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel and mother of Jacob. She was buried in the cave of Machpelah, bought by Abraham from the children of Heth. Rebecca was a hundred and thirty-three years old when she died.

Jacob wept exceedingly for his mother, and indulged in grievous lamentation for her and her wet-nurse Deborah under an oak that was afterwards called *Alon-Bachuth*, the Oak of Weeping. Laban the Aramean also died about this time.

2. Rebecca's age at her death.

[According to the traditional *Seder Olam Chronology* Rebecca was three years old and Isaac was forty [25:20] when they were married. She remained barren for the first twenty years of her marriage, making her twenty-three years old when she bore Jacob.

Jacob was now ninety-nine years old when he reentered the land. Rebecca died then, making her one-hundred and twenty-two ($99 + 23 = 122$) at the time of her death.

(That Jacob was ninety-nine at this time is a simple calculation: Jacob was sixty-three when he received the blessings and fled [see footnote to 25:17]; he spent fourteen years in the

וישלח ט וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-יַעֲקֹב עוֹד בָּבֹא מִפָּנָן
 לה/ט-י י אָרָם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר-לוֹ אֱלֹהִים
 שְׁמֶךָ יַעֲקֹב לֹא-יִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עוֹד יַעֲקֹב כִּי
 אִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל יִהְיֶה שְׁמֶךָ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ

Isaac's death (v. 29), without concern that Isaac would be cursed.

However, the reason for the veiled reference is because very little honor could have been paid to her at the funeral in view of Isaac's blindness which confined him to the house so he could not attend; Esau's known hatred for her; and Jacob's absence. Cf. the *Midrash [Tanchuma Ki Teitzei 4]*: 'Since Esau was the *only one* of her family able to be present at the funeral, there was apprehension that people would curse Rebecca as the mother who bore him. Therefore, they took out her bier at night. Accordingly, since she was buried in this manner by Hittites, the Torah does not explicitly state her death, but also alludes to it only in a veiled manner. [However, in the case of Isaac's death, Esau was not the only member of the family in attendance; Jacob was there too.]

Sifsei Chachomim suggests that the intent is that Rebecca's death was hidden even from Esau *himself*, so he would not participate. Were he to be the only child present, the other participants would particularly notice him and curse Rebecca for bearing him.

It must be remembered that Rebecca was the only one of all the Patriarchs who gave birth to someone wicked [Ishmael was *Hagar's* son, not *Sarah's*.] Hence the apprehension that she would be cursed.

Academy of Eber; twenty years in Laban's house, and two years traveling [eighteen months in Succoth and six months in Bethel]. Thus $63+14+20+2=99$).

However, there is a different opinion based on the *Sifri* which states that Rebecca's life span equaled that of Kehath (which, as recorded in *Exod. 6:18*, was 133 years). According to this chronology, Rebecca was 133 years old when Jacob was ninety-nine, and she was fourteen when she was married.

Tosafos (Yevamos 61a s.v. וכן) concludes that the above *Midrashim* are indeed conflicting. *Mizrachi* in his dissertation to 25:20 and here concludes similarly but adds that the primary Rabbinic chronology agrees that Rebecca was three at her marriage, and hence 122 at her death, not 133.]

Sefer HaParshiyos comments that the mother would tend to be blamed more for the wickedness of a child than the father. A father's primary role is to teach Torah and to educate his child. If the child develops badly, people shrug it off saying that the child refused to accept the teachings of his righteous father. But a mother raises and nurtures her child. Her imprint is there in his very being. People will tend to blame *her* for his evil characteristics for they indicate her failure in the day-to-day task of raising him.

Gur Aryeh cites the Talmudic teaching that a mother contributes flesh, blood, and sinew to the infant. These are the parts of a human that symbolize base instincts. Thus, she is blamed if he follows his animal cravings.

9. God consoles Jacob.

וַיֵּרָא ... עוֹד בָּבֹא מִפָּנָן אָרָם — *And God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan Aram.*

This appearance occurred *after* the weeping had ceased, since the *Shechinah* does not reside where there is sadness (*Sforno*).

עוֹד, *again*: i.e., the second time at the same place, the first having been when he left home on his journey to Paddan Aram (*Rashi*).

⁹ And God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan Aram, and He blessed him.

¹⁰ Then God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob. You shall not always be named Jacob, but Israel shall be

In Paddan Aram, however, God never appeared to him except when He communicated with him through an angel (*Sforno*).

[Cf. the angel's communication in 31:11-13 where even God's command of 31:3 appears in retrospect to have been part of the angel's message; however see other opinions cited there.]

וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתוֹ — And He blessed him.

— With the blessing [of consolation] given to mourners [in this case upon the death of Jacob's mother] (*Rashi*).

[Comp. 25:11 where *Rashi* similarly explains that God 'blessed' Isaac by consoling him during his mourning for Abraham.]

10. Jacob is formally named Israel.

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֱלֹהִים — Then [lit. and] God said to him.

According to *Radak* this verse gives the content of the blessing mentioned in the previous verse.

[However, following *Rashi's* Midrashic interpretation that the blessing in verse 9 was a consolation upon Rebecca's death, the construction of our verse implies that this is a new blessing, unrelated to that of v. 9. Were this to be nothing more than a continuation, reading the content of the earlier blessing, as *Radak* maintains, the verse would not mention God as the subject, but would use the pronoun: ... And He said to him. However, one difficulty does remain: If, as *Rashi's* Midrashic interpretation maintains, v. 9 is a blessing of consolation for the tragedies of v. 8, then the two verses are closely related. However, the Masoretic division begins a new paragraph with v. 9, indicating that it is not connected to the events of v. 8. This may be the reason that *Radak* associates v. 9 with our verse rather than with v. 8.]

שְׁמֶךָ יַעֲקֹב — Your name is Jacob.

Despite the fact 'the lord of Esau' [the angel who struggled with Jacob in 32:29] changed your name, you are still named Jacob, for it was not his mission to do so (*Ramban*).

[Thus, God was saying, as noted in the *comm.* to 32:29, that the angel had only informed Jacob — under great duress — that God would eventually change his name. It was not the angel's mission to have actually effected the change then.]

— Your name Jacob is not being taken away from you even now; it will still remain one of your names (*Alshich*; see below).

לֹא יִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עוֹד יַעֲקֹב — You shall not always be named Jacob [lit. your name shall not be called more Jacob].

You shall no longer be called only [or: primarily] Jacob (*Ibn Ezra*. See *Berachos* 13a cited below where it is clear that the name Jacob was not henceforth to be obliterated).

You shall no longer be known by a name which implies deceiver and supplanter (*Rashi*; cf. 32:28).

The word עוֹד [more] in this context does not have the connotation of never again, but of continuously, as in 8:22 עוֹד כְּלִי-יְמִי הָאֵרֶץ. The connotation then is: You shall not continuously be known as Jacob; you will be known by another name also (*R' Hoffmann*).

כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל יִהְיֶה שְׁמֶךָ — But [(idiomatic) lit. but if; for but]] Israel shall be your name.

I.e., Israel shall also be your name (*Ibn Ezra*).

וּשְׁלַח יֵאָמֵר לוֹ אֱלֹהִים אֲנִי אֵל שְׂדֵי
 לַחַיִּים-יִבְרָה וְרִבָּה גֵוִי וְקָהַל גּוֹיִם יְהִיָּה מִמֶּךָּ
 שְׁשִׁי יִבְרָה וּמְלָכִים מְחַלְצִיךָ יֵצְאוּ וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ

— A name which signifies Prince and Chief (*Israel*).

וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל — Thus [lit. and] He named him *Israel*.

— In addition to his name Jacob. This does not suggest that it became forbidden to call him Jacob (*Radak; Ramban*).

Since God Himself later refers to him as Jacob [46:2] it is obvious that the name Jacob was not to be abolished, but made subsidiary to his new name *Israel*. Thus, according to the Sages in *Bera-chos* 13a, *Israel* would henceforth be his principal name, with Jacob subsidiary to it. This is different from the case of Abraham whose name-change was absolute, and regarding which the *halachah* is that whoever refers to him by his former name Abram transgresses a negative command. See *comm.* on pp. 563-564, and *comm.* to 32:39.

This [as noted above] is the force of the opening phrase וַיִּקְרָא, your name is Jacob, i.e., your subsidiary name will always remain Jacob, notwithstanding the fact that a new principle name is now being added to it. This phrase does not occur in the case of Abraham; therefore, his name change was absolute (*R' David Feinstein*).

The name Jacob continued to be used in matters pertaining to the physical and mundane, while *Israel* was used in matters reflecting the spiritual role of the Patriarch and his descendants (*R' Bachya*).

[A difficulty arises from *Rashi's* interpretation to 25:26 that God named Jacob at birth, if the name was God-given, how could it now have been deemed inadequate? See *comm.* there, p. 1061. (Perhaps the Divine origin of the name Jacob explains why it was not abolished as was Abram's, after the same change, but remained at least the secondary name).]

According to *Sforno*, God conferred upon

Jacob the implication of sovereignty upon the gentile nations contained in the name *Yisrael*. Its effect was that he would be able to withstand his enemies, and his progeny would be sole survivors in the End of Days.

11. God ratifies the earlier blessings.

[In the following blessing, God confers on Jacob the blessings of fruitful abundance and the land which He — as *El Shaddai* — had given to Abraham upon changing his name [17:1ff]. This is also a confirmation of the Abrahamitic blessings which Isaac had conferred upon Jacob when he ordered him to go to Paddan Aram [28:3ff]. Then, Isaac had blessed Jacob that God would indeed bless him after his return from Paddan Aram, and that a community of people would descend from him. The following is God's confirmation of that blessing.]

In the commentary, citations will be drawn from the parallel expressions in the earlier blessings.]

אֲנִי אֵל שְׂדֵי — I am *El Shaddai*.

— I am sufficient [שְׂדֵי=שָׂאֵנִי] to bless, for the blessings are Mine (*Rashi*).

[Comp. *comm.* to this Name on 17:1; 28:3. See also 43:14 where *Rashi* interprets: 'God שְׂדֵי, Who is sufficient in granting His Mercies (אֵל) reflects God's attribute as Dispenser of Mercy [*Rashi, Exodus* 34:6]), and in Whose hand is sufficient (שְׂדֵי) power to give. This is the real meaning.']

According to *Sforno*, this expression denotes a divine Oath: I swear by My Name. This is the only place we find that God swore in His Name to Jacob. [See *Exod.* 32:13.]

your name.' Thus He named him Israel. ¹¹ And God said to him, 'I am El Shaddai. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a congregation of nations shall descend from you, and kings shall issue from your

פְּרָה ורָבָה — *Be fruitful and multiply* [or: *and be numerous*].

— This was a blessing [not a command], as at the Creation (*Ibn Ezra*). [This differs from the view in *Yevamos* 65b cited in footnote below.]¹¹

— The allusion was to Benjamin who had not yet been born, though Rachel was already pregnant with him (*Rashi*).

Sforno perceives this as an exhortation: Do not be dismayed even if your children's behavior does not please you. Continue to have children nevertheless; then your family will survive even when the other nations are destroyed.

[Comp. God's blessing to Abraham in 17:6: וְהִפְרֵתִי אִתְּךָ בְּמֵאד מְאֹד, *I will make you most exceedingly fruitful*; and Isaac's blessing to Jacob in 28:3: וְהִפְרֵתִי וְיִרְבֶּה, *May He make you fruitful and make you numerous*.]

גוי וקהל גוים יהיה ממך — *A nation and a congregation of nations shall descend* [lit. *shall be*] from you.

Rashi offers three interpretations:

(a) [There are two blessings here]: Yet to descend from Jacob are a nation — i.e., Benjamin; and a congregation of nations — i.e., Menashe and Ephraim, who would

descend from Joseph and would be given the status of tribes.

(b) [The phrases form one unit, meaning: A nation — one that may be regarded as one of the world's congregation of nations — will descend from him.] This means that his descendants who would descend to Egypt with him (*Exodus* 1:1) will number seventy, corresponding to the existing seventy nations [see *comm.* to 10:1 (p. 309)]. Furthermore, the Sanhedrin, too, would consist of seventy (*ibid*).

(c) [A nation — one that will conduct itself like the other congregations of nations — will descend from him.] This signifies that later, in the days of Elijah, Jacob's descendants would sacrifice on *בָּמוֹת*, *high places*, like all the other nations, at a time when this practice was forbidden to Israel.

[Compare God's parallel blessing to Abraham in 17:6: וְנִתְחַיֵּיתִי לְגוֹיִם, *And I will make nations of you*. Isaac to Jacob in 28:3: וְהָיִיתָ לְקֹהֵל עַמִּים, *And may you be a congregation of peoples*.]

Targum Yonasan renders: A holy people, and a congregation of priests shall descend from the sons you have begotten.

וּמְלָכִים מִחֲלָצִיר יֵצְאוּ — *And kings*

1. R' Yosef in *Yevamos* 65b derives from the use of the singular masculine expression פְּרָה ורָבָה, instead of the plural, genderless נִרְבָּה, that the *mitzvah* of procreation is incumbent on man, not on woman.

That in 1:28 and 9:1, the similar phrases to Adam and Noah are in plural is no contradiction, since those expressions are preceded by 'and God blessed them'; thus they are not understood as commands, but as Divine blessings — that they will have abundant offspring, as *Tosafos* ad. loc. observes.

The *mitzvah* of procreation, however, is primarily derived from 9:7, where as *Maharsha* counters, the commandment is given in the plural. There it also applies only to men, however, notwithstanding the plural, since, the context makes clear, it was addressed to Noah and his sons (*Torah Temimah*).

וישלה להויג
 יג ולזרעה אחריו אתן אתהארץ: ויעל
 מעליו אליהם במקום אשר דבר אתו:
 אשר נתתי לאברהם וליצחק לה אתנה

shall issue from your loins.

— Saul and Ishbosheth who were of the tribe of Benjamin (*Rashi*).^[1]

[And although they were born hundreds of years later, they were still regarded in a loose sense as descending from Jacob's loins.]

According to *Sforno*, the blessing was that men fit to be kings will descend from him; Israel will not require strangers for her kings.

[Comp. God's blessing to Abraham in 17:6: ומלכים ממך יצאו: *Kings shall issue from you*. There is no parallel, however, in Isaac's blessing to Jacob.]

12. As part of this pledge of abundant progeny, God reiterates the Promise of the Land with which this pledge is always associated (*Malbim*).

ואת הארץ אשר נתתי לאברהם וליצחק ואתנה — [And] the land that I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, I will give to you.

I.e., just as I have given the land to Abraham and Isaac with the strength of an oath — a grant not subject to forfeiture by sin — I will similarly give it to you with an oath. This is Scripture's intent in saying [Exod. 33:1]: *The land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob*. [Though we find nowhere

that God *swore* explicitly to Jacob, the oath is implied in this passage]. For originally [in 28:13] Jacob was promised the land without an oath, but perhaps the repetition of that prophecy here constitutes an oath (*Ramban*). [Cf. 26:3. The concept that a repeated phrase constitutes an oath is from *Shevuos* 36a; cf. *Rashi* to 8:21 on the repetition of לא אסף. See also *Sforno* to v. 11.]

— And to your offspring after you I will give the land [lit. earth].

— I.e., in the End of Days I will give your offspring the *entire* ארץ, earth, not only Eretz Yisrael, as He said [28:14]: *Your offspring shall spread powerfully westward, eastward, northward, and southward* (uncensored ed. of *Sforno*).

This assurance was specifically reiterated to Jacob to emphasize that it was in his offspring that the covenant would be fulfilled and not in Esau's (*Ramban* to 26:3).

13. ויעל מעליו אליהם — Then [lit. and] God ascended from upon him.

This is similar to the case of Abraham [17:22] where it is likewise said: *God ascended from upon*

1. Abner explained this verse as referring to Saul and Ishbosheth when he made Ishbosheth king after the death of Saul, instead of David. [The idea is that Abner justified his support of Ishbosheth by noting that the intent of this verse is that *kings* in plural, denoting a minimum of two, would descend from the as yet unborn child of Jacob. Benjamin was the only unborn child, although, as noted, he was already conceived. The Rabbis in the *Midrash* maintain, however, that *this* application of the interpretation was misguided.]

The tribes of Israel interpreted this verse to imply Benjamin's continued existence among the tribes. On this basis, they reconciled with the tribe of Benjamin after the affair of the Concubine of Gibeah, and allowed their daughters to marry with Benjaminites [thus, in effect assuring Benjamin's continual existence within the tribes of Israel and the eventual accession to the throne by descendants of that tribe] (Old text of *Rashi* from *Midrash*).

35 loins. ¹² *The land that I gave to Abraham and to*
12-13 *Isaac, I will give to you; and to your offspring after*
you I will give the land. ¹³ *Then God ascended from*
upon him in the place where He had spoken with
him.

Abraham. The literal sense of the expression indicates that it was not merely a vision or dream, but that the *Shechinah* [if one can so perceive It] actually rested upon him where he stood. Kabbalistically, [as noted in the *comm.* to 17:22] the expression intimates that the Patriarchs are the 'chariot' of the Omnipresent [i.e. His vehicle, the direct bearers of His Glory on earth; see *Overview to Lech Lecha: The Patriarchs* — page 357 (*Ramban*)].

Abarbanel maintains that this expression denotes an abrupt cessation of the Divine communication. Having just been promised abundant progeny and the land, Jacob was naturally anxious to ask more details: What was the significance of his wrestling bout with Esau's guardian angel? What effect would Esau's descendants have upon his descendants? What tribulations would they endure? What assurances were there that the promise would not be forfeited? But suddenly — *God ascended from upon him!* God had no intention of revealing to Jacob anything beyond what He had just done, and so He removed the prophetic inspiration from upon him, and Jacob perceived no more. This is akin to the case of Abraham where it says [17:21]: *And when He had finished speaking with him, God ascended from upon Abraham.*

בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר אִתּוֹ — *In the place where He had spoken with him.*

— I.e., when he had left home for Charan. It was at this very site that God had now appeared to him again and then ascended (*Sforno*).

[This expression occurs three times in the following verses.] *Rashi* comments without further elaboration: 'I do not know what this [expression] is intended to teach us.'

— That is, although the *Midrash* derives from the earlier part of this verse, as it does from the parallel expression in the case of Abraham [17:22], that 'the Patriarchs are the chariot of the Omnipresent,' nevertheless the phrase *In the place where He had spoken to him* does not occur in the case of Abraham. Therefore, *Rashi* feels that its inclusion here is inexplicably superfluous.

Furthermore, as noted, the expression is repeated three times in these verses. Perhaps it is the repetition of this phrase that *Rashi* finds difficult (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

[*Rashi* makes a similar comment in 28:5. *Kitzur Mizrahi* there observes that '*Rashi* was indeed aware of possible interpretations, but he knows of none that he considers to fit the literal flow of the narrative.'

In the kabbalistic sense, *Ramban* explains its inclusion by interpreting, as noted, that the *Shechinah* had actually rested upon the place where he stood, and now It ascended from that place. The sense of the *Shechinah* esoterically being in a 'place' must be understood in the context of *Ezekiel* 3:12: *Blessed be the Glory of HASHEM from His place.*

Kli Yakar adds that this expression supports and further amplifies the Midrashic interpretation of 28:17. Jacob was now standing at Luz/Bethel which he had described as the gate of heaven since Mount Moriah had been transported there [see *comm. ibid.*] Thus this phrase, stating that the *Shechinah* rose up directly from that very spot, in-

וישלה יד ויצב יעקב מצבה במקום אשר דבר
 לה/י-טז אתו מצבת אבן ויסך עליה נסך ויצק
 טו עליה שמן: ויקרא יעקב את שם המקום
 אשר דבר אתו שם אלהים בית-אל:
 טו ויסעו מבית אל ויהי-עוד כברת-הארץ
 לבוא אפרתה ותלד רחל ותקש

timates that the Earthly Temple corresponds to the Heavenly one. Jacob remained on earth while the *Shechinah* rose up to the corresponding holy spot in heaven.

Furthermore, the *Zohar* perceives an implication from this phrase that Mount Moriah was again uprooted and merged with Luz/Bethel for the occasion of this sanctification, as it had been before.

14. Jacob fulfills his vow.

ויצב יעקב מצבה במקום אשר דבר אתו
 — [And] Jacob had set up a pillar at the place where God had spoken with him.

— The translation in past-perfect follows *Ibn Ezra* and *Ramban*: Jacob had erected such a pillar when God first spoke to him at Bethel [28:18]. Thus, this verse does not describe a new pillar, but refers to the original one. Jacob now rededicated it in fulfillment of his vow of 28:22.

Ibn Ezra adds that, alternatively, this verse could be describing a new pillar, but he prefers the former interpretation. *Ramban* concurs, and writes: 'This is the correct view.'

The Torah mentions that Jacob set up the pillar at the place where God had spoken to him to emphasize that Jacob fully perceived the sanctity of that very site — now even more so than before — as a result of all the Divine Revelations

he experienced there (*Radak*; see *Ramban* above).

The question of how Jacob could have set up a pillar, an erection which the Torah later forbade and ordered destroyed, is discussed in the *comm.* to 28:18 s.v. וישם.

אבן — A pillar of stone.

— The stone on which he had slept, and which had miraculously coalesced [28:18; 22 (*Midrash*). See *Ramban* there who distinguishes between a pillar which consists of one standing stone, and an altar which is constructed of many stones.]

ויסך עליה נסך — And he poured a libation upon it.

— This, Jacob did now (*Ramban*).

According to *Ibn Ezra*, this pouring of water or wine was to cleanse the pillar in preparation for the ritual pouring of oil which was to follow. Most commentators however, perceive this act of libation to be a ritual act in itself, symbolic of future libations that Jacob's descendants would make as part of their sacrificial service in the Temple.

Cf. *Targum Yonasan*: '... and he poured upon it a libation of wine and a libation of water because this is [symbolic of] what would be done [by his descendants] at the feast of Succos.'

In this vein, *Sforno* [who apparently interprets that this Luz/Bethel site was identical with

¹⁴ Jacob had set up a pillar at the place where God had spoken with him — a pillar of stone — and he poured a libation upon it, and poured oil upon it.

¹⁵ Then Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

¹⁶ They journeyed from Bethel and there was still a stretch of land to go to Ephrath, when Rachel went

Mount Moriah, as noted in the *comm.* to 28:19] maintains that Jacob thereby fulfilled his vow [28:22]: *Then this stone which I have set up as a pillar shall become a House of God.* The libation served to dedicate the place in preparation for that ultimate purpose.

[*Rashi* to 28:22 similarly comments that this verse describes the fulfillment of Jacob's vow.]

וַיִּצֹק עָלֶיהָ שֶׁמֶן — And [he] poured oil upon it.

[Thereby anointing it and consecrating it as an altar. (See *Rashbam* to 28:18 and *Rashi* to 31:13).]

In 28:18, Jacob had but a meager amount of oil, so he poured oil only *עַל רֹאשָׁה*, on its top [see *Radak* there]; now he had oil in abundance, so he poured oil *עָלֶיהָ*, upon its entire surface.

It is self-evident that while in Bethel, Jacob also fulfilled the portion of his vow concerning tithes [28:22], and gave the tithes to 'one in that generation worthy of receiving it' (*Ibn Ezra*). [According to *Rashi* on 32:22, Jacob had already set aside the tithes before he sent his tribute to Esau.]

¹⁵ וַיִּקְרָא וַיַּעֲקֹב אֶת שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם אֵשֶׁר — Then Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him [there] Bethel.

He had named it Bethel previously [28:19], but he reiterated that name several times to confirm that

it was indeed a suitable place for a *בֵּית אֱלֹהִים*, lit. *House of God*, and that the Divine Presence would always be manifest there (*Ramban*).

Or *HaChaim* [following *Radak*] suggests that Jacob had originally named the entire city Bethel. This verse informs us that now he bestowed that name also on the immediate area surrounding the pillar where God had spoken to him.

According to the *Vilna Gaon's comm.* to *Joshua* 16:12, there were three different locations that Jacob named Bethel: In 28:16; *El Bethel* [35:7]; and *Elohim Bethel* in our verse. [Apparently, he translates our verse to mean: *And Jacob named the place where He had spoken to him: Elohim Bethel.* Cf. on *El Bethel* in v. 7.]

❖ The birth of Benjamin and death of Rachel.

¹⁶ וַיְהִי עוֹד כְּבָרְתָּהּ אֶרֶץ לְבֹא אֶפְרָתָה — And there was still a stretch of land [i.e. a short distance (see *Rashi* below)] to go [lit. to come] to Ephrath.

[Identified in v. 19 with Bethle-hem.]

The phrase *בְּכָרְתָּהּ אֶרֶץ* is discussed by *Rashi*. He cites *Menachem* who relates the word *בְּכָרְתָּהּ*, much, and accordingly explains the phrase to mean: a great distance. *Rashi* also cites the *Midrashic* interpretation that it is related to *בְּכָרְתָּהּ*, sieve, referring to the time of year when the earth is riddled with holes like a sieve — a time when the land is plowed. This follows the winter

וישלח לה מיוזיה
 בלדתה: ויהי בהקשתה בלדתה ותאמר
 לה המילדת אל-תיראי כי-גם-זה לך בן:
 ויהי בצאת נפשה כי מתה ותקרא שמו

rainy season, and precedes the intense summer heat. [Unlike the roads during the rainy season, they are then fully passable. (See Rashi to 48:7 where this is definitely the implication).]

Rashi discounts the above as incorrect. As proof, he cites *II Kings* 5:19 where it is related that Naaman departed *הָאָרֶץ* [There it could not mean a great distance as Menachem interprets, since the context implies that he went only a short distance when Gehazi ran after him; nor is the Midrashic interpretation that the land was passable relevant to the context there.]

Accordingly Rashi concludes that the expression *כְּבֵרַת הָאָרֶץ* means a *כְּבֵרַה*, 'certain measure of land' which is called a *כְּבֵרַה* [*kiurah*]. This is similar to such expressions as *אֲצֵרִים* of vineyard; a portion (חֶלֶקֶת) of the field. In measuring walking distance, the term '*kiurah* of land' is used to denote a certain distance [the exact length of which is now unknown to us].

From Rashi's commentary to the parallel expression in 48:7, it becomes clear that a short distance is meant equal to about 2,000 cubits [about ¼ of a mile] — the distance outside of a city permitted to be covered on the Sabbath (חֻצוֹת שַׁבָּת). The Midrashic interpretation takes *כְּבֵרַת אֶרֶץ* as a description of the terrain, showing that the road was not impassable; were it not for the Divine command to bury Rachel there by the roadside, Jacob could have borne her to Bethlehem.]

Ramban writes that while he lived in

Spain he agreed with Radak [*Shorashim* s.v. *ברא*] that the root word was *ברא*, to take food, and the כ is not a root letter of the word, but the כ of comparison. The expression *כְּבֵרַת* accordingly would mean: like the distance of *בֵּרַת*, i.e. the distance one journeys from the morning until the first meal is taken [probably equal to several miles], for travelers measure distance in this manner.

When Ramban arrived in Eretz Yisrael, however, and saw that Rachel's Tomb was less than a mile from Bethlehem, he realized that both Menachem and Radak's interpretation [that it denotes a great distance] must be rejected.

Rather, Ramban concludes along with Rashi that the term denotes a measure of land, but that the כ is a prefix meaning approximately, indicating that it was not an exact measure [rendering: 'there was still about a (certain measure) of land to Ephrath.'] Alternatively, the word is an adjective derived from *בֵּרַת=בְּרַת*, a daughter of land signifying a short distance, about a mil, the 'daughter' [i.e. a smaller measure than] of the larger *parasang* or some other ancient measure of distance.⁽¹⁾

Ibn Ezra renders similarly. Ibn Janach renders 'about a mil' as does Radak in his comm. to *II Kings* 5:19 (in an obvious change from his opinion cited by Ramban from *Shorashim*). Onkelos translates *בְּרִיכַת* אֶרֶץ, which Rashi in 48:7 interprets to denote an amount of land equal to a full day's plowing.

Ralbag here and in *II Kings* *ibid.*, ex-

1. Ramban adds from personal observation the insight that Rachel's Tomb is not in Ramah or near it as would seem to be the plain meaning of the verse in *Jeremiah* 31:15: *A voice is heard in Ramah ... Rachel weeping for her children*. It is about four parasangs from the Ramah of Benjamin and more than two days' journey from the Ramah of Ephraim. The verse in *Jeremiah* must therefore be a hyperbole: So loud was her weeping that it could be heard as far as Ramah, on top of a mountain in the territory of her son Benjamin. Or as *Targum Yonasan* renders, the phrase means *a voice was heard On High*... Therefore the verse does not read in *Ramah*, *Rachel weeps for her children*, instead it reads, *a voice was heard בְּרִיכַת, On High*.

35 into labor and had difficulty in her childbirth. ¹⁷ And
17-18 it was when her labor was at its most difficult, that
the midwife said to her, 'Have no fear, for this one,
too, is a son for you.' ¹⁸ And it came to pass, as her
soul was departing — for she died — that she named

plains our expression to denote a measure of land equal to those cultivated fields and vineyards which surround a city. Thus, the verse notes how only a small stretch of cultivated land separated the spot of Rachel's death from Bethlehem.

וַתֵּלֶךְ רָחֵל וַתִּקְשׁ בְּלִדְתָּהּ — When [lit. and] Rachel went into labor [lit. gave birth] and [she] had difficulty in her childbirth.

The Midrash records that Rachel was one of three women in Scripture who had hard labor and died shortly afterwards. The others are the wife of Phineas [*II Samuel* 4:19-22] and Michal, the daughter of Saul [Midrashically derived from *II Samuel* 6:23].

The Sages observe that a woman's account is examined in heaven primarily when she is in labor. For we have learned in *Mishnah Shabbos* 2:6 that for three transgressions do women die in childbirth. And though our mother Rachel was not guilty of any of these three, nevertheless, because Jacob said, 'With whomever you find your gods, he shall not live' (31:32), she was punished, and her judgment was not carried out until she was in childbirth. Thus people say, 'When the ox is fallen the knife is sharpened' (*Midrash Lekach Tov*).

17. אֶל־תִּירָאִי — Have no fear.

— 'That your hard labor will result in your death.' The midwife said this to cheer her in her travail (*Rashbam*).

According to *Sforno*:

— That your hard labor indicates that it might be a girl. (The Sages in *Niddah* 31a say that the travail is much harder when it is a girl).

[The idea is that Rachel had greatly longed for another son (see 30:24), and seeing that her labor was so difficult, Rachel grew apprehensive that she was giving birth to a daughter. Therefore the midwife comforted her this way (*Torah Temimah*).]

בֶּן־יִגְמֶלָה לָךְ — For this one, too, is a son for you.

גַּם, too, — i.e., in addition to Joseph. According to the Midrash with each of Jacob's other sons [except Joseph (*Gur Aryeh*; see *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* cited at the end of 30:23)] a twin sister was born, while with Benjamin an additional sister was born and the word גַּם, too, serves to include this second sister as well (*Rashi*).

[The Midrashic implication is that when Rachel discovered that two girls emerged she grew apprehensive and was reassured that in addition to this (second) one, there is a son for you.]

— As you prayed when Joseph was born [30:24] saying: May HASHEM add on for me another son (*Rashbam*).

Following *Sforno*: For this one, too, is a son for you — although the labor is so hard.

18. וַיָּהִי בְצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ בִּי מֵתָה — And it came to pass, as her soul was departing — for she died [past tense as indicated by the cantillation accent on the first syllable of מֵתָה].

וישלח בן-אוני ואביו קרא-לו בנִימין: ותמת רחל ותקבר בדרך אפרתה הוא בית להיט

— The sense is: For she was dying, but not yet dead (*Midrash Shmuel*).

Tur notes that the literal implication of the verse is that she named him after she died. He comments that she seemed to die and then was unexpectedly revived. She named her newborn son and 'died' again.

[See *Zohar* where the implication is the reverse: 'This verse makes it clear that when Rachel's soul departed, it did not return and so she died.']

Tosefes Brachah renders בן מיתה as a parenthetical interpolation: ... As her soul was departing — when she died — .

בן-אוני — Ben Oni.

— Son of my sorrow (*Rashi*; *Onkelos*).

— Son of my mourning [as if to say: His birth caused my death]. Cf. the expression לחם אונים, bread of mourners in *Hoshea* 9:4; באני, my mourning, in *Deut.* 26:14 (*Ibn Ezra*; *Ramban*).

ואביו קרא לו בנִימין — But his father called him Benjamin.

Rashi offers two interpretations:

(a) The name means בן ימין, son of the right, that is, son of the south [for in Hebrew thinking, the primary orientation is toward the east, hence right=south. Cf. *Onkelos* to 13:9 where right refers to the south, and *Psalms* 89:13 צפון ימין, north and south.]

This name accordingly commemorates how Benjamin alone of all Jacob's children was born in Canaan which lay south of Paddan Aram [cf. *Numb.* 33:40; and above, 12:9]. This is the reason the name is spelled out in full here [i.e. with the י after the מ=בנִימין, thus suggesting the derivation of the name (בן-ימין)]. In all other passages in

Scripture, however, the second י is omitted (בנימן) since there is no point in continually emphasizing the derivation of the name (cf. *Sota* 32b). Furthermore, the vocalization (which is a *chirik*) allows this letter to be dropped without danger of mispronunciation (*Torah Temimah*).

(b) The word ימים, [yamim] days can be spelled ימין [yamin] as it is in *Daniel* 12:13, לקץ הימין, at the End of Days. Thus, Jacob named him 'son of my days' as if to say that he was born in his father's advanced years. *Rashbam* interprets similarly.

Ramban differs on geographical grounds with *Rashi*'s primary interpretation that Benjamin's name means 'son of the south.' He cites various verses which would indicate that Aram was southeast of Eretz Yisroel which accordingly lay to its north; hence a name meaning 'son of the south' to commemorate the child's birth in Canaan would be incorrect. [*Mizrachi* however, in his dissertation to 32:2 defends *Rashi*'s (and most commentators') contention that Aram was to the northwest of Canaan and hence the appellation was quite appropriate.]

Ramban concludes that Rachel, near death, called him Ben Oni, meaning 'son of my mourning.' Jacob wished to preserve the form of the name given by the child's mother, but wished to give it an optimistic connotation. So, reinterpreting oni to mean 'strength' [see 49:19: רַאשִׁית אוֹנִי], he named the child ben yamin, [lit. son of the right] i.e., 'son of power' or 'son of strength,' since the right hand is a symbol of strength and success [cf. *Eccles.* 10:2; *Psalms* 21:9].

35 him Ben Oni, but his father called him Benjamin.
19-20 ¹⁹ Thus Rachel died, and was buried on the road to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. ²⁰ Jacob set up a monu-

[The construction of the subject+predicate נִקְרָא אָבִיו instead of נִקְרָא אָבִיו indicates a contrast to the previous statement, hence 'but his father called him.' Cf. *comm.* top of p. 494 to 14:8 ... וְקָלְבִי צָדֵק חוֹצֵא, and to 31:47: לוֹ וְיִשְׁעָב קָרָא לוֹ.]

[Jacob was 99 years old at Benjamin's birth.]

19. וַתָּמָת רָחֵל — Thus, [lit. and] Rachel died.^[1]

And as the verse continues *she was buried* — immediately, for the law requires that one be buried near the time of death (*Midrash*) — especially in the case of a woman who died in childbirth (*Radal*; cf. *Moed Katan* 27a).

The Sages [*Rosh HaShanah* 6a] note that 'whoever leaves a vow unfulfilled, his wife dies.' Hence, because Jacob delayed so long in fulfilling the vow he made upon his departure, his wife died. (See *Meshech Chochmah* to 31:13).

That it was Rachel rather than Leah who now died is variously explained. [See *Overview* to *Vayeitzei* for other implications of Rachel's death at this time and in this place.]

The *Midrash* to 31:14 cites an opinion that since Rachel presumptuously spoke up before her older sister she died first. According to another opinion [cited also by *Rashi* *ibid.* v. 32], Rachel died first

because of the curse implied in Jacob's statement to Laban [*ibid.*]: *Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive*, which was a fatal prognostication.

Since, as noted, a woman's 'account in heaven' is examined primarily while she is in childbirth, Rachel's judgment was carried out now (*Lekach Tov*).

According to *Seder Olam* there was a tradition that Rachel was born on the day Jacob received his father's blessings. Jacob was sixty-three years old when he received the blessings, and was ninety-nine years old when he entered the land [see footnote end of v. 8]. Therefore Rachel was thirty-six years old when she died [99-63=36].

וַתִּקְבֹּר בְּדָרֶךְ אֶפְרָתָה הוּא בֵּית לֶחֶם — And [she] was buried on the road to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

I.e., which is now known as Bethlehem; a city in Judah located five miles south of Jerusalem. Its names: *Ephrath* [from פָּרָה, *parah*, fruitfulness] and *Bethlehem* [lit. house of bread] both reflect the abundance of its crops. This Bethlehem is often referred to in Scripture as *Bethlehem of Judah* to distinguish it from another city by that name in the western Galilee in

1. In a major pronouncement on the sanctity of *Eretz Yisrael*, *Ramban* to *Deut.* 18:25 notes that Jacob would never have married two sisters in *Eretz Yisrael*, a liaison the Torah would later forbid. Therefore, *Ramban* concludes, God caused the death of Rachel — the sister married second and therefore the forbidden one — on the way, shortly after entering the land. Because of Rachel's merit she did not die before she entered the sacred environs of the land; and because of Jacob's merit, he did not remain married to two sisters after having settled in the Land; the sanctity of the land would not bear it.

[See *comm.* to 26:5 (p. 1083); 29:28; 32:15; *Leviticus* 18:18. Regarding the judgment of Sodom being so severe because *Eretz Yisrael* would not tolerate abomination in its environs, see *Ramban* to 19:5, and *Overview* to *Vayeira*: 'Eretz Yisrael — The Supremacy of the Land' (p. 400).]

וישלה כ לחם: ויצב יעקב מצבה על-קברתה הוא
 לה/כי-כב כא מצבת קברת-רחל ער-היום: ויסע
 ישראל ויט אהלה מהלאה למגדל-
 ער: ויהי בשכן ישראל בארץ ההוא

the lower Zebulun region (*Joshua* 19:15) [somewhat south of today's Haifa]. In *Yerushalmi Megillah* 1, the latter Bethlehem is called *Bethlehem Tzeriyah* (*Otzar Yisrael* s.v. *Bethlehem*).

Jacob's intention in choosing this site in the middle of the road, rather than bringing her the short distance to Bethlehem was that he prophetically foresaw that his descendants going into exile would pass that way. He buried Rachel there so she should pray for them as it is said [*Jeremiah* 31:15]: *Rachel weeping for her children* (*Midrash*).

Comp. *Rashi* to 48:7 where Jacob further justifies his action and states that he buried her there by the command of God.

Rachel died in territory which would later be the portion of Benjamin [*Sifre*, *Deut.* 33:12]. *Ramban* to v. 16 accordingly writes that Jacob buried her on that very site, on the wayside, and did not bring her into nearby Bethlehem because he foresaw that Bethlehem would belong to the tribe of Judah. He wanted her body to lie in the portion of her son, Benjamin, on whose border her tomb is. [See footnote to v. 16.]

[See *Rashi* and *Mizrachi* cited above to 30:15 regarding why Rachel of the two sisters was the one who forfeited the right to be buried with Jacob in the Cave of Machpelah.]

Furthermore, in his *comm.* to 48:7 *Ramban* notes that since his

marriage to Rachel — as the second sister — would have been prohibited by Torah Law [see footnote], Jacob could not bury her in the Cave of Machpelah 'for he would be embarrassed before his ancestors.'

It has been noted that in yet another display of the reserve of the Scriptural narrative, nothing is said of Jacob's grief over the death of the woman for whom he patiently worked for fourteen years. It is only alluded to later on in the pathetic reference in 48:7 (*R' Hoffmann*).

20. The Tomb of Rachel.

— ויצב יעקב מצבה על-קברתה [*And*] *Jacob set up a monument over her grave.*

— To serve as a memorial (*R' Hirsch*), and to assure that since her grave was on a public thoroughfare, it could be identified as such and not be defaced (*Sforno*).

He wanted the site of her grave to be known until the day of Resurrection of the Dead (*Zohar*).

Though the righteous have enough of a memorial through their good deeds, Jacob knew that his descendants would pass that way. He wanted her grave to be recognizable, so that his children would stop to pray there in time of trouble, and Rachel would intercede on their behalf (*Midrash; Yafeh Toar*).

The word קברתה, *her grave*, is synonymous with קברה (*Ibn Ezra*).

— הוא מצבת קברת-רחל ער היום *It is the monument of Rachel's grave*

35 ment over her grave; it is the monument of Rachel's
21-22 grave until today.

²¹ Israel journeyed on, and he pitched his tent
beyond Migdal Eder. ²² And it came to pass, while

until today.

— I.e. until the time of Moses, when the Torah was committed to writing (*Radak*).

[Cf. the expression in 19:37, 38; 26:33; 32:33.]

R' Meyuchas explains the intent to be: As long as the world endures.

— It serves as a place for prayer until today (*Me'am Loez*).

According to R' Saadiah Gaon: This is the site known as the 'Tomb of Rachel' until today.

21. וַיֵּסַע יִשְׂרָאֵל — [And] Israel journeyed on.

— Toward his father's house in Hebron (*Radak*).

He could not bear the grief of remaining near his beloved wife's tomb. He journeyed on to assuage his grief, but he was not yet ready to meet his father; he encamped temporarily at Migdal-Eder (*Emunas Chachomim*).

וַיֵּסַע יִשְׂרָאֵל מִקְדָּלֶיֶדֶר — And [he] pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder [lit. Tower of the Flock].

The name of an area near Bethlehem, as is evident from the context of Micah 4:8 (*Rashbam*).

While the above reflects the view of the commentators on our verse, they perceive the term מִקְדָּלֶיֶדֶר lit. 'Tower of the Flock', as it appears in Micah 4:8 differently. There they do not interpret it as a proper noun, but as an adjective alluding variously in that context to: 'the anointed one of the flock of Israel' (*Targum*); 'the Temple' (*Rashi*); 'the Tower of David, and more correctly: Jerusa-

lem itself which is a tower to the flock, i.e. Israel' which congregated like flocks in Jerusalem during the thrice-yearly pilgrimage festivals (*Ibn Ezra; Radak*).

22. Reuben's incident with Bilhah.

[After Rachel's death, Jacob established his primary residence in the tent of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant. Reuben took it upon himself to defend his mother's honor, so he moved Jacob's bed to Leah's tent. This is all that actually transpired, as explained by the *Talmud* (see *comm.* below). Nevertheless Scripture describes it in such stark terms as if Reuben had sinned grievously. This is in line with the dictum that even minor transgressions of great people are judged with the utmost gravity because the personal conduct of the holy ancients was measured by infinitely higher standards than ours. For a person of Reuben's stature to tamper with Jacob's marriage bed was a coarse act, and the Torah so labels it. This concept is explained at length in the *Overview to Ruth*.

Nevertheless in *Megillah* 25b it is ruled that out of respect for Reuben's memory, the incident of Reuben is read in the Synagogue but not translated (into the vernacular by the *Meturgeman* when the Reader read from the Torah as was the custom in ancient times). As *Rashi* explains there, however, the prohibition applies only to a brief literal translation that easily lends itself to misunderstanding.]

וישלה לח/כב וילך ראובן וישכב את-בלהה פילגש אביו וישמע ישראל

That this incident is recorded at all in the Torah, is to explain Jacob's later reference to it in 49:4 (*Rashbam*).

ויהי בשכן ישראל בארץ ההוא — *And it came to pass, while Israel dwelt [lit. was dwelling] in that land.*

I.e., all this happened before Jacob returned to his father in Hebron (*Rashi*) It was a punishment, for he delayed on the way and did not proceed immediately to Isaac (*Mizrachi*).

Thus, the intent of this passage is not merely to inform us where the incident occurred, but to stress that this misfortune, too, resulted from Jacob's delay in returning home. Instead of traveling as quickly as he could, he *dwelt* in that land (*Gur Aryeh; Tzeidah LaDerech*).

Radak interprets differently. Jacob did not actually *dwelt* there, rather his party was so large and journeyed so slowly, that they *seemed* to be dwelling in the land (*Radak*).

On the connotation of שכן, *dwelt*, in contrast to ישב, *settle*, see *R' Hirsch* to 14:13.

וילך ראובן — *That [lit. and] Reuben went.*

This is the same expression used of Reuben in 30:14 when he 'went' to gather *dudaim* for Leah. All Reuben's 'goings' were for the sake of his mother (*Emunas Chachomim*).

Here, too, as in the case of the *dudaim*, it was selflessness that

prompted Reuben to act (*Or HaChaim* to 30:14).

וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶת-בִּלְהָה פִּילְגֶשׁ אָבִיו [he] lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine.

Rashi explains that this is not to be understood literally. Rather, Reuben tampered with his father's couch [by removing it from Bilhah's tent (see below)], but the Torah charges him for this as if he had actually lain with her.^[1] What caused Reuben to disarrange and 'defile his father's bed' [cf. reference to this in *I Chron.* 5:1]?:

— During Rachel's lifetime, Jacob's couch [i.e., primary residence] was always in Rachel's tent [see 29:31 s.v. וַיִּרְחַל עֲקֵרָה]; upon her death he removed it to Bilhah's tent. Reuben resented this insult to his mother [Leah], saying, 'If my mother's sister Rachel was my mother's rival, is that any reason that the *handmaid* of my mother's sister must now become my mother's rival?' He therefore acted in order to right matters (*Rashi*).

[This interpretation that 'lay with his father's wife' means that he tampered with his father's couch is based on *Shabbos* 55b where the Sages emphatically declare that Reuben did *not* commit the sin of adultery. They proclaim that שֶׁאָמַר רְאוּבֵן חָטָא אֵינוֹ אֵלָא טוֹעָה, *Whoever says Reuben sinned* (and actually lay with Bilhah) is *mistaken*, and advance the explanation cited by *Rashi* above.

As further proof that Reuben did not

1. Although Reuben did not sin in the literal sense the Torah refers to his act the harshest terms. The sin of adultery involves the talking of a wife from her husband. Reuben interfered with his father's right to conduct his married life as he saw fit. Thus, in a figurative sense, Reuben's deed could be legitimately related to that of an adulterer. Furthermore, the privacy of the marital relationship is a major component of the Jewish concept of morality. The Sages state that adherence to the code of modesty is a prerequisite to holiness. Therefore, Reuben's interference with Jacob's privacy is related, in degree, to an immoral act (*Harav David Feinstein*).

literally commit this sin, the *Talmud* notes that Reuben's descendants would stand one day on Mount Ebal when the curses would be pronounced upon those who did not keep the Torah. Among these curses was [Deut. 27:20] *Cursed be he who lays with his father's wife.* Had Reuben been guilty of this cardinal sin, would God have allowed the Reubenites to be among those six tribes chosen to stand on Mount Ebal when those curses would be uttered? [To publicly recall the former sins of a penitent is forbidden (*Torah Temimah*).] Therefore, the incident must be understood as interpreted by the Sages.

Maharsha suggests that the latter may be interpreted in the reverse: Since God knew that Reuben's descendants would one day be chosen to proclaim this curse, would He have allowed Reuben himself to stumble in this matter? He notes that the difficulty of this interpretation is that Providence does not direct man's behavior in matters of sinfulness.

Another view in the *Talmud* *ibid.* is that Reuben transposed two couches — one of the *Shechinah*, and the other of his father. [*Rashi* there explains that Jacob had set a couch for the *Shechinah* in the tents of each of his wives, and 'wherever the *Shechinah* came to 'rest' so to speak, there Jacob spent the night. (See *Rashi* on 49:4).]

Ramban suggests that Reuben tampered with Bilhah's couch for fear that Jacob might have another son by her, as she was still young, and so diminish his heritage. Reuben was accordingly punished measure-for-measure in being deprived of the right of the first born [see *1 Chron.* 5:1]. Thus, the phrase *the sons of Jacob were* [i.e., remained] *twelve* would mean literally that Jacob did not beget children after that.

The Kabbalists write that Menashe and Ephraim were destined to be conceived from Jacob the night Reuben transposed the couch. Because of his interference, they were not born, and this was accounted to him as if

he had lain with his father's wife (*ARIZAL*). The explanation of why Jacob considered Menashe and Ephraim as his own sons [48:3] is the fact that they were worthy to have been born of him. When HASHEM blessed Jacob: *Be fruitful and multiply* [v. 11], Rachel had already been pregnant with Benjamin, so Jacob assumed that Rachel would yet bear these two other children for him. When Rachel died, Jacob removed his residence to the tent of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, so the children could be considered as Rachel's.

Reuben was aware of this [i.e. that there would yet be two children — Menashe and Ephraim — whom Jacob would consider his own, and of Jacob's intention in locating his residence in Bilhah's tent]. However, he wanted his mother to bear those children, and so he transposed his father's couch into her tent, thereby affronting both his father and Bilhah, and preventing the birth of the offspring that were to have descended from her. This invasion of his father's conjugal privacy was tantamount to having sinned with his father's wife (*Malbim*). [See continuation of this comment in the footnote, at end of this verse.]

¶ Why Jacob moved to Bilhah's tent.

[Attempts have been made to explain why Jacob moved his couch to Bilhah's tent although Leah might feel slighted by his doing so. At the outset, the question must be put in perspective. The actions of the Patriarchs are motivated by considerations beyond our ability to understand — this is axiomatic. Of course, we attempt to derive lessons from their deeds, but we dare not make the mistake of thinking that the reasons we understand are the *only* ones or that they are necessarily correct. This is similar to attempts to find reasons for the commandments of the Torah. Many of the greatest commentators have done so, but always with the stated understanding that while we try to derive lessons from the Torah, we can in no way claim to plumb the depths of the Divine wisdom.]

Perhaps we may add that in view of Leah's particular role in the history of Israel (see *Overview: Jacob, Rachel, and*

וישלה כג ויהיו בני־יעקב שנים עשר: בני לאה בכור יעקב ראובן ושמעון ולוי ויהודה

(Leah), it need not have been appropriate for her ever to be regarded as the primary wife on earth.

Maharsha justifies Jacob's action in moving his primary residence to Bilhah's rather than Leah's tent, by noting how Rachel had been the mainstay of his household, and his primary wife. She was the woman for whom he had served Laban a total of fourteen years [whereas Leah had become his wife only by subterfuge, and therefore remained secondary to Rachel.] Accordingly when Rachel died, Jacob honored her memory by moving his primary residence to the tent of her handmaid Bilhah. She was also his legitimate wife in the fullest sense of the word, since Rachel had freed her before Jacob married her [see on 30:4-5].

Furthermore, that the Torah here refers to her as a concubine is only to allude to Reuben's misconception of her as such. He believed that she was not Jacob's full-fledged wife, and therefore he became indignant over the slight to his mother's honor. But later in this verse, the Torah goes on to emphasize that all twelve sons — including those of Bilhah and Zilpah — were equally full-fledged sons of Jacob, and that by implication Bilhah was his legitimate wife. That Reuben erroneously entertained thoughts to the contrary, was tantamount to defiling his father's wife, and the Torah records it as such.

In another sense it might be conjectured that it was only natural for Jacob to select Bilhah's tent. Rachel had died leaving an infant son, and Bilhah, her maidservant, undoubtedly cared for the baby. She also raised Joseph, the next to youngest child, who was about eight years old at the time. Since Benjamin and Joseph were Jacob's youngest, most dependent and — as survivors of Rachel — his best-loved children, he chose Bilhah's tent for his primary residence (R' Nosson Scherman).

[In summary, there are two lines of reasoning, both valid, to explain why Reuben had no right to do what he did even though his intention was honorable:

1) Even assuming that Reuben was correct in deciding that Jacob had erred, he had no right to take it upon himself to interfere with Jacob's privacy.

2) Reuben should have realized that any decision of Jacob could be based on considerations far beyond the obvious. Any action of a Patriarch must be viewed with as much awe as if it had been a *Scriptural decree*.]

וישמע ישראל — And Israel heard.

— I.e. heard that Reuben tampered with his bed. The Torah tells of Jacob's awareness in order to prepare us for his reference to the defilement in 49:4 (*Chizkuni*).

— He shuddered and said, 'Woe is to me that there is such unworthiness in a son of mine.' He was informed by God, however, that Reuben had repented [see below] (*Sifre, Devarim* §31).

Cf. *Targum Yonasan's* interpretation of our verse: And Israel heard it and it grieved him, and he said, 'Alas that one so profane should have come forth from me, just as Ishmael came forth from Abraham and Esau from my father!' [See continuation below.]

ויהיו בני־יעקב שנים עשר — [And] the sons of Jacob were twelve.

Although the *Mesorah* considers this clause to be part of verse 22, it begins a new paragraph which lists all twelve tribes as a unit for the first time since they were born. In Torah scrolls, the two passages are separated by an open space. By combining these two sections

though one disjointed verse, the Torah portrays the humility of Jacob. Though *Jacob became aware* that his son had profaned his couch, he did not disinherit him or remove him from the genealogy of his sons, but still counted him among them. וַיְהִי בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר, *the sons of Jacob were twelve* — Reuben was not rejected; he continued to be listed first among them (Ramban; Sforso).

[Again this is a graphic example of Jacob's marvelous reserve. He does not react immediately to Reuben's tactless invasion of his privacy. Jacob restrains himself for now, but his condemnation would be voiced on his death bed 'blessing' to Reuben (49:4), and a certain aspect of his birthright was taken away from him and given to Joseph (Rashi v. 23).]

Rashi makes no specific mention that this verse bridges two chapters in the Hebrew. He notes, however, that the parenthetical digression relating to the incident of Reuben abruptly ends, and he explains that the Torah returns to the previous narrative — the birth of Benjamin. When Benjamin was born the destined number of Jacob's sons [twelve] was complete. Accordingly, it was proper that the sons should be enumerated and the Torah proceeds to do so. The Sages interpret the passage as teaching that *all twelve sons* [including Reuben] *were equal in merit and righteous*, for in actuality Reuben had not sinned.

R' Munk observes that the fact that the Torah enumerates the children of Jacob on sixteen different occasions — each time in a different order — can be explained

in the light of Rashi's comment that 'it wants to teach that all were equal, all were righteous.' [In each of the instances, however, Reuben is listed first.]

[Continuing Targum Yonasan]: ... The Divine Spirit answered Jacob and said, 'Fear not, for all are righteous and none of them are profane!'

According to Sifre [see above], our passage signifies that Reuben had repented [for the Torah testifies that Jacob's children — notwithstanding what had occurred — were twelve: *all* were equally meritorious and righteous].

BaMidbar Rabbah 13 also derives from this passage that Reuben had repented. The open space between the text of the incident and the genealogy indicates that Reuben caused himself to be separated from the status of his brothers, but because he repented wholeheartedly, he became wholly at peace with his family; as the verse concludes, he was again counted among them. The sacrifice later offered by the Prince of Reuben in Numb. 7:34 was to fully atone for the incident of Bilhah.

[See Maharsha above that this passage emphasizes — notwithstanding Reuben's slur that Bilhah was a concubine — that *Jacob's sons were twelve* — all twelve of them were equally Jacob's sons, and their mothers equally his wives.]

Others perceive that the first part of the verse is abruptly dropped because the Torah made its point and prepared the reader for the reference to this in Jacob's blessing of Reuben in 49:4; there was no further point in lingering upon so distasteful a theme. This, however, does not explain why a *new* verse does not begin with the phrase *the sons of Jacob*, etc. It is rather as the Sages say: Both paragraphs were

וּשְׁשָׁכָר וְזִבְלוֹן: בְּנֵי רָחֵל יוֹסֵף וּבְנֵימָן:
 וּבְנֵי בְלָהָה שְׁפָחַת רָחֵל הָיוּ וּנְפֹתָלִי: וּבְנֵי
 זִלְפָּה שְׁפָחַת לֵאָה גֵּר וְאֶשֶׁר אֱלֹה בְנֵי
 יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר יִלְדֻּלּוּ בְּפָנָיו אַרְסָּה: וַיָּבֵא
 יַעֲקֹב אֶל-יִצְחָק אָבִיו מִמֶּרָא קְרִיתִּית

combined into a single verse to show that Reuben's action did not cause him to be excluded from the tally of Jacob's sons (*B'chor Shor*).¹¹

23. *The sons of Leah: Jacob's firstborn, Reuben.*

Even when the context of the narrative relates his degradation, he is called *first born* ... He was *first-born* with respect to:

(a) *inheritance* — he received the firstborn's double portion of Jacob's legacy, and his tribe was the first to get its share of *Eretz Yisrael* (*Yafeh Toar*);

(b) *service* — [i.e., Reuben's name appeared first on the breastplate which the High Priest wore during his service (*Sifsei Chachomim*); according to *Matnos Kehunah*, Reuben, as firstborn, performed the sacrificial service for the family, a privilege that belonged to the first-born until the sin of the Golden Calf (cf. *Rashi* to 25:31)]; and

(c) *counting* [i.e., genealogy; when the children of Israel are enumerated, Reuben always comes first].

That the birthright was taken from him and given to Joseph [see *I*

Chron. 5:1] was only with respect to *tribes* — for Joseph formed two tribes [just as a firstborn son receives a double share of his father's property, whereas Reuben formed only one] (*Rashi*).

This is based on the *Midrash* which records that 'The Holy One, Blessed be He, is reluctant to uproot a name from its genealogical place.' Thus it is written [*I Chronicles* 5:1]: *The sons of Reuben, Israel's firstborn — for he was the first born. But inasmuch as he defiled his father's couch, his birthright was given to Joseph [whose sons, Menashe and Ephraim constituted two separate tribes]; nevertheless he was to be reckoned in the genealogy as first born.*'

Sforno writes that because Reuben repented — and repentance reaches God's Throne of Glory — he did not forfeit his birthright in the scale of Heavenly judgment. Even in This World, the birthright with its privileges remained his. Jacob took it from him as he was legally entitled to do. Similarly, in Talmudic times one guilty of excommunication was not considered excommunicated until a prominent person pronounced him as such. Cf. *Moed Katan* 16a.

25. *שְׁפָחַת רָחֵל — Maid-servant of Rachel.*

She had already been freed when

1. Following *Malbim's* kabbalistic interpretation: Jacob understood what had occurred, as a result of which *the sons of Jacob remained but twelve*; having missed that propitious night, Jacob thereby lost the opportunity to have two more children of his own.

It was with this incident in mind that Jacob later told Joseph [48:3]: *El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and He blessed me, and said to me, 'I will make you fruitful and numerous, making you a community of peoples ... ' Now [that I lost that promise] your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Menashe shall be mine just like Reuben and Simeon.*

35 *Issachar; and Zebulun.* ²⁴ *The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.* ²⁵ *The sons of Bilhah, maidservant of Rachel: Dan and Naftali.* ²⁶ *And the sons of Zilpah, maidservant of Leah: Gad and Asher. — These are the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.*

²⁷ *Jacob came to Isaac his father, at Mamre, Kiriath*

Jacob married her [30:4]. The Torah refers to Bilhah as Rachel's *maidservant* only to indicate that Bilhah still conducted herself with Rachel as a maidservant. The same was true of Zilpah's relationship with Leah (*Haamek Davar*; cf. 30:7 and 12).

26. אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר יָלְדוּ לוֹ בְּפָדָן אָרָם — *These are the sons of Jacob who were* [lit. *was*; (the verb is in singular)] *born to him in Paddan Aram.*

Actually only *eleven* of his sons were born in Paddan Aram; Benjamin was born in Canaan. As the Torah often does, it generalizes [see 46:23] (*Ibn Ezra*).

They were listed here to record that Jacob returned to his father with all his twelve sons (*Chizkuni*).

That the verb יָלַד, *was born*, is in the singular, indicates that they were all regarded as a single entity (*Lekach Tov*).

27. Jacob reunites with his father.

וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב אֶל-יִצְחָק אָבִיו — [And] *Jacob came to Isaac his father.*

That Jacob's beloved mother Rebecca is not mentioned here proves that she had already died earlier. Had Rebecca still been alive she would have been mentioned since it was she who advised Jacob to go to Paddan Aram, and was the cause of all the benefit he acquired there; Isaac had merely acted on her advice (*Ramban* to v. 8).

[The reunion was certainly emotional and tearful: Isaac had not seen Jacob — the heir of the Abrahamic covenant — for twenty-two years (including his fourteen years in the Academy of Eber, it was thirty-six years). Jacob had left empty-handed and now came back with twelve sons — all meritorious and righteous — plus a great camp. But this joy was tempered with sorrow: Rebecca was not there to witness Jacob's return, nor was Rachel ever to meet her parents-in-law.

Jacob resided with Isaac until his death, twenty one years later. But his stay was deeply marred by the sale of Joseph eight years after the return home (see v. 29 below).]

מִמְרֵה קִרְיַת אַרְבַּע — *At Mamre, Kiriath Arba.*

Mamre is the name of the plain; Kiriath Arba [lit. *city of four*] is the name of the city. Hence the phrase מִמְרֵה קִרְיַת אַרְבַּע means *to the plain called Mamre of Kiriath Arba* (*Rashi*).

Mamre was the name of the original owner of the plain (*Rashi* to 13:18). [He was one of the confederates of Abraham. See 14:13; footnote to 17:26; 18:1.]

According to *Ramban* in 12:6, however, whenever Mamre is mentioned alone, rather than *plains of Mamre* — as in 23:19 and here — it is the name of a city.

וישלה הארבע הוא חברון אשר-גר-שם
 לה/כח-כט כח אברהם ויצחק: ויהיו ימי יצחק מאת
 כט שנה ושמונים שנה: ויגוע יצחק וימת

The meaning and origins of the name *Kiriath Arba* are fully discussed in the *comm.* and footnote to 23:2.

In the Hebrew, the definite article ה, *the*, appears in the name קריית הארבע, lit. *Kiriath of the Arba*. *Rashi* explains that the ה precedes the second word [*Kiriath HaArba*] and not the first word [*HaKiriath Arba*] for there is a grammatical rule that whenever a name is compounded of two words such as *Kiriath-Arba*, *Beth-Lechem*, *Avi-Ezer*, and *Beth-El*, the definite article, ה, whenever required, precedes the second part of the name. Thus, we find הלחמי העיר, the *Bethlehemite* [*I Samuel 16:1*]; אבי העזרי, the *Aviezrites* [*Judge 6:24*]; בית האלי, the *Bethelite* [*I Kings 16:34*].

חברון — *That is Hebron.*

— I.e. which later came to be called *Hebron* [*Joshua 14:15* and *Judges 1:10*].

On *Hebron*, see *comm.* to 13:18; 23:2 and 19.

אשר גר שם אברהם ויצחק — *Where Abraham and Isaac sojourned.*

Hebron, a city sacred from ancient times, was the primary residence of the Patriarchs. See *Prefatory Synopsis* to 23:1 (p. 857), and *comm.* to 24:63 s.v. והוא יושב. As noted often in the *comm.*, the verb גור indicates that they resided there as גרים, *aliens* — separate and distinct, leading solitary lives, and not intermingling socially with the heathen citizens (*Sh'lah; Haamek Davar*).

The recollection that a citizen had righteous, respected forebears creates good will and friendliness toward him on the part of his neighbors (*Sforno*).

28. The death of Isaac.

וייהיו ימי יצחק — [*And*] *Isaac's days*

were.

The Torah does not say of *Isaac*, as it does of the other Patriarchs, ויחי יצחק, and *Isaac* lived. This is because, in certain respects, *Isaac* cannot be considered to have 'lived' in the full sense of the word: he remained without a destined wife until the *Akeidah*, and 'he who is without a wife is as one who is without life.' Also, after the *Akeidah* his eyesight was diminished; and since a blind man is considered as dead, the Torah does not refer to him as having 'lived' (*Or HaChaim*).

מאת שנה ושמונים שנה — *One hundred [years] and eighty years.*

Abraham, too, was to have lived to that age, but God caused him to die five years earlier, at 175, so that he would not witness the beginning of *Esau's* evil conduct (see *comm.* to 15:15 and footnote to 25:8, p. 975).

ויגוע יצחק וימת ויאסף אל-עמיו — *And Isaac expired and died, and he was gathered to his people.*

[The expressions *expired*, *died* and *gathered to his people* are discussed in the *comm.* to 25:7-8. These terms occur together only in the case of a righteous person's death.]

The Torah does not follow a chronological order אין מוקדם [ומאוחר בתיורה] in recording *Isaac's* death here. The sale of *Joseph* actually preceded *Isaac's* death by twelve years (*Rashi*).⁽¹⁾

[As can be calculated from the footnote, *Jacob* was 108 years old when *Joseph* was sold and 120 years old when *Isaac* died. *Jacob* was in his hundredth year when he returned

35 *Arba; that is Hebron where Abraham and Isaac so-*
28-29 *jourled. ²⁸ Isaac's days were one-hundred and eighty*
 years. ²⁹ And Isaac expired and died, and he was

to his father. Accordingly, Isaac lived twenty-one years after this point in the narrative and did not die until twelve years after Joseph had been sold. This anachronism prompted *Rashi's* citation of the Rabbinic dictum that the Torah does not concern itself with strict chronological order.]

Ramban maintains [referring to his *comm.* to the death of Terach in 11:32] that it is in accordance with the Torah's usual practice to complete the story of one person with his death and then go on to the next generation, even though

events recorded later might have preceded the death.

Thus, as noted in the *comm.* to 25:7, the Torah bids farewell, so to speak, to a person when there is nothing further of his life that it must recount. Then, the Torah can proceed uninterrupted to the central figure of the succeeding narrative. Accordingly, Noah's death is recorded in 9:29 before the history of his sons although Noah lived well into the days of Abraham [see vol. I p. xii:

1. *Rashi's* chronology is based upon the following calculations:

[A]	
Isaac's age when he died	180
Isaac's age at Jacob's birth (see 25:26)	- 60
Jacob's age at Isaac's death	120

[B]	
Jacob's age when he received the blessings and left his father's house [see p. 1173]	63
Years engaged in study at Academy of Eber	+ 14
Years he served Laban until Joseph was born	+ 14
Jacob's age when Joseph was born	91
Joseph's age when he was separated from his father and sold [see 37:2]	+ 17
Jacob's age when Joseph was sold	108

[C]	
Jacob's age at Isaac's death [see "A" above]	120
Jacob's age when Joseph was sold ["B" above]	-108
Number of years Isaac lived after the sale of Joseph	12

[D]
*Alternate calculation — more directly supported by Biblical texts —
 to arrive at the same conclusion.*

Joseph's age when he stood before Pharaoh [41:46]	30
Joseph's age when he was sold [37:2]	-17
Total years Joseph had been in Egypt before the famine	13
Seven years of plenty and two years of famine before Jacob came to Egypt [45:6]	+ 9
Total years Joseph was in Egypt until Jacob's arrival	22
Jacob's age, as given to Pharaoh when he came to Egypt [47:9]	130
Years elapsed since Joseph had been sold	- 22
Jacob's age when Joseph was sold	108
[continue with "C" above to arrive at conclusion.]	

וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל-עַמּוּי זָקֵן וְשָׁבַע יָמִים וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ עֶשְׂרֵי וַיַּעֲקֹב בָּנָיו:

וישלח
לה/כט

Chronology/Time Line]; the passing of Terach (11:32) is recorded before the story of Abraham, although Terach lived another 60 years (in that case the *Midrash* offers a special interpretation; see *Rashi* and *Ramban* there); and the death of Abraham (25:7) is recorded before the birth of his grandson Jacob (25:26) though Abraham lived until Jacob was fifteen years old. The same is true of the narrative here recording Isaac's death who was still alive when his grandson Joseph was sold into slavery.]

Ramban concludes that the above being so, we might have expected Isaac's death to have been recorded earlier, prior to the narrative of Jacob's experiences, just as we find of Abraham and the earlier generations [whose deaths were recorded before the experiences of their offspring were related.] — Perhaps, it was left for this point to emphasize that Isaac died in a *good old age ad content of years* [as it says of Abraham], for he lived to see the return of Jacob his spiritual heir, and had the privilege of having both his sons — Jacob and Esau — attend to his burial.

However, it is observed that when Isaac died, twelve years after Joseph was sold, they were still under the impression that Joseph was dead. And so we can see why the words *בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה*, in a *good old age*, used in recording Abraham's death (25:8) are explicitly missing in the account of Isaac's death (*Pesikta*).

[But cf. *Rashi* to 37:33 that Isaac prophetically knew that Joseph was alive, but since God did not reveal it to Jacob, Isaac also maintained a profile of being ignorant of the fact and instead pretend to mourn along with his son.]

זָקֵן וְשָׁבַע יָמִים — *Old and fulfilled of days.*

[Compare the expression used in the case of Abraham (25:8): *בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה זָקֵן וְשָׁבַע*, at a *good old age, mature* (lit. *old*) and *content*. See *comm.* there for meaning of the expressions which are applicable here. Cf. expression used regarding David in *1 Chron.* 29:28: *And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honor*. See also *Pesikta* cited above as to why the expression at a *good old age* is omitted here.]

In the case of Abraham the expression *fulfilled of days* does not occur because his 'days' were not full — five years were deducted from his life (*Lekach Tov*). [See *Rashi* to 15:15 and footnote to p.975.]

Ramban in 25:8 explains this expression *fulfilled of days* to mean that Isaac's soul was satisfied with his days; he was fully content with whatever each day brought him and he had no desire that the future days should bring him something new. This is a further example of God's mercy toward the righteous, in that they are content with their lot and desire no luxuries.

Furthermore, as the *Midrash* records, the expression *old and fulfilled of days* implies that he foresaw his share in the Garden of Eden.

[Cf. *Midrash Rabbah* 62:3: The Holy One, Blessed be He, shows the righteous in This World the reward He is accumulating for them in the World to Come. Their souls become contented and they fall asleep; i.e., they die as if falling asleep after a

satisfying, relaxing experience.]

Chasam Sofer suggests that like the expression *בָּנָא בְּיָמָיו*, *came with the days* [see on 24:1], *שָׂבַע יָמִים*, *represents one whose life was full and meaningful in every aspect*. Not one moment of Isaac's life was wasted or spent on anything but service to his Creator.

וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ עֶשָׂו וְיַעֲקֹב בְּנָיו — *And his sons, Esau and Jacob, buried him.*

— In the Cave of Machpelah. It was unnecessary to specify this was the burial site since Isaac resided in Hebron [v. 27] where the cave was located, and it was obvious that they would not have buried him anywhere but in his father's gravesite (*Ramban*).

Esau and Jacob are mentioned here in order of birth. [Esau was the firstborn and Jacob gave him precedence; the Torah therefore mentions him first (*Rashbam*).] In the case of Abraham's burial [25:8], though both of his sons jointly attended to his burial, Isaac is mentioned before the older son Ishmael, because Isaac was the son of Sarah, and clearly had precedence over

Ishmael who was the son of the maidservant, Hagar (*Ibn Ezra; Akeidah*).

[Cf. *Rashi* and *comm.* to 25:8 according to which the prior mention of Ishmael in that verse indicates that it was Ishmael himself who, because he had repented, took a secondary role and gave precedence to Isaac. Esau, however, maintained his arrogant wickedness and refused to stand aside for Jacob. (See *Mizrachi* and *Gur Aryeh* cited there).]

Midrash Or HaAfeilah [cited by *Torah Sheleimah*] suggests that Esau is mentioned first because he had always honored his father to an extraordinary degree.

Oznaim LaTorah explains why Jacob deferred to Esau. Jacob knew that Esau had vowed to kill him. He also knew, as the prophet says [*Amos* 1:11], that Esau nursed his grudge forever. Therefore, Jacob recognized that the day of Isaac's burial could be more dangerous to him than even the confrontation at the Ford of Jabbok. In order not to give Esau a pretext for an angry attack, Jacob honored him by allowing Esau to hold first rank at the burial.

XXXVI

1. The Chronicles of Esau.

[As has been emphasized constantly throughout this commentary, the Torah is not merely a history book. It records only facts from which we can derive halachic or moral lessons.

Although many important principles of the Torah (גופי תורה) are derived only from brief textual allusions (ברמיקור), in this case the Torah devotes an entire chapter to the seemingly unimportant genealogies of Seir-Edom!

It is clear, that the Torah would not have devoted so much space to this topic unless it contained many sublime mysteries. Though much of such esoteric knowledge eludes us, the kabbalists have dwelt heavily upon it. A profoundly mystical part of the *Zohar*, (part 3, pp. 127-145), known as the *Iadra Rabbah*, is devoted to its exposition.

Even in the literal sense of the verses, several factors surface.

From the earlier mention of Esau's

וּשְׁלַח אֶבְרָהָם וְאֵלָה תְּלִדוֹת עֵשָׂו הוּא אֶדוֹם: עֵשָׂו לָקַח
 לְנָשָׁיו מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן אֶת־עֵדָה בַּת־
 אֵילֹן הַחֲתִי וְאֶת־אֶהֱלִיבָמָה בַּת־עֵנָה
 בַּת־צִבְעֹן הַחֲתִי: וְאֶת־בִּשְׁמַת בַּת־

wives in 26:34 and 28:9, from certain discrepancies within the genealogical listing that follows, and from the parallel genealogies in the Book of *Chronicles* it emerges that many of Esau's descendants were of incestuous or illegitimate birth. This, as well as the halachic and moral lessons that are perceived from other discrepancies in the listing — for example that a man's sins are forgiven on the day of his marriage and that *Amalek* is excluded from the general designation of Edomite — are dealt with fully by the *Rishonim* (early commentators) and shall be presented below.

Mizrachi (to verse 12) points out that this entire genealogy was recorded only to emphasize the depravity of Esau's family; therefore, any suggestion of their illegitimacy and immorality that can be gleaned from the allusions in the various verses (although not readily discernible from the literal meaning of the Text) should be encouraged (הֵיכָא) (ראיבא למירש דרשינן). The *Midrash* emphasizes this purpose of the chapter by recalling *Jeremiah* 49:10: *I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secrets, he can no longer hide himself.*

Furthermore we learn of the honor that came to Esau only by virtue of his being of Abraham's seed.

As *R' Hoffmann* notes in his *comm.* to 24:34, it is common for the Torah to repeat a halachic or narrative passage *בשכיל דבר שנתחדש בה*, because of substantive detail that is added in the second version (*Sotah* 3a). As we shall note, this genealogy contains many such instructive nuances and additions.]

וְאֵלָה תְּלִדוֹת עֵשָׂו — *And these are the genealogies of Esau.*

The conjunctive *and* connects this with the foregoing. Having

concluded the story of Isaac, Scripture proceeds to narrate that of his children. It begins with Esau's line, listing his genealogy and mentioning their military and political ascendancy. With chapter 37, the Torah will return to deal in greater detail with Jacob's progeny, Isaac's primary offspring (*Abarbanel*).

Sforno renders: *These are the histories [chronicles] of Esau* — that which time brings forth (גִּלָּה). [For various interpretations of תולדות as referring to offspring, descendants, genealogies, products, chronicles, history, cf. *comm.* to 2:4; 6:9; 11:27; 25:12, 19.]

וְהוּא אֶדוֹם — *Who [lit. he] is Edom.*

I.e., he acquired the name Edom at an early age [see 25:30] and continued to be so called. The nation that later descended from him was also called by that name and was so known in the time of Moses (*Radak; Ibn Ezra*).

The description of Esau as Edom is meant to provide an insight into his character. He was given the name Edom when he greedily demanded beans from Jacob; so consumed was he by desire for food that he described it by color, not even recognizing its name. This sort of gluttonous, acquisitive greed characterized him all through life (*Sforno*; cf. also *comm.* to verses 7 and 19).

עֵשָׂו לָקַח אֶת־נָשָׁיו מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן — *Esau had taken his wives from among the Canaanite women.*

¹ And these are the genealogies of Esau who is Edom. ² Esau had taken his wives from among the Canaanite women: Adah, daughter of Elon the Hittite; Oholibamah, daughter of Anah, daughter of Zibeon the Hivite; ³ and Basemath, daughter of

— [Much to the consternation of Isaac and Rebecca (see 26:35). These wives were actually Hittites; the Torah refers to them by the broader designation *Canaanites* since the Hittites (from Heth) were descendants of Canaan (25:16).]

This passage does not refer to *new* wives, but to the women Esau had already married [26:34 and 28:9]. Hence the past-perfect construction עָשָׂה לָקַח, Esau *had* taken, rather than the conversive עָשָׂה לָקַח, Esau *took* (Hoffmann).

אֲדָה בְּתֹאֵלֹן הַחִתִּי — Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite.^[1]

— She is Basemath daughter of Elon already mentioned in 26:34. She was known as Basemath because she burned incense (*besamim*) to idols (*Rashi*).

We do not say that this verse refers to wives other than those previously mentioned since, as noted, the verse says נָשָׁיו לָקַח אֵת, 'had taken' his wives, meaning that he had previously taken them. Therefore, the discrepancy of names is exegetically instructive and must be interpreted (*Mizrachi*).

R' Hirsch comments that the discrepancy of names should not be considered disturbing. Even in the comparatively small circle of the Abrahamic family, several people had two names: Abram, Abraham; Sarai, Sarah;

Esau, Edom; Jacob, Israel; Benjamin, Benoni. It should not be surprising, therefore, that Adah and Basemath are one and the same, or that Oholibamah was also called Judith.

[But cf. *Ramban* below who, pursuing the literal sense, suggests that she may be a sister whom Esau married because Basemath was childless.]

... וְאֶחָאֵהֱלִיבָמָה (2) — [And] Oholibamah, daughter of Anah, daughter of Zibeon.

— She is identical with Judith daughter of Beeri (26:34) [both she and her father having two names]. Esau had given her the name Judith in order to deceive his father into believing that she had abandoned idol worship (*Rashi*).^[2]

Ramban disagrees with *Rashi's* interpretation, maintaining that *Rashi* does not account for the change in her father's name from Be'eri to Anah. Furthermore, consistency would require that our chapter should use either real names in all cases, or descriptive names in all cases. *Rashi* does not explain why, in the case of Adah he considers Basemath to be only a descriptive name and her real name to be Adah, while in the case of Basemath, daughter of Ishmael, (v.

1. [The names in the following genealogies are numbered in the sequence in which they appear in the Torah to correspond with the Genealogical Table on page 1535].

2. The name Judith has come to mean 'Jewess' but that would be an anachronism and it is clearly not its implication here. Also, the name has no relationship to Judah who was not yet born at the time.

R' David Feinstein notes that Esau chose the name יהוּדִית with which to deceive his father since it contains the four letters of HASHEM's Ineffable Name. Similarly in *Megillah* 13a the words יהוּדִית and יהוּדִי are interpreted to refer to anyone who has repudiated idolatry.

3), he considers Basemath to be the real name and Mahalath a descriptive name ...

He offers that, possibly, the wives in this verse are different ones, and in the literal sense the original wives mentioned in 26:34 – Judith and Basemath – may have died childless, perhaps in punishment for their rebelliousness to Isaac and Rebecca [26:35]. Esau then married *Adah*, the sister of Basemath and another woman by the name of *Oholibamah*, daughter of *Anah*. [See on Basemath, next verse.]

[As we shall see in *Rashi's comm.* to v. 4, s.v. *Korach*; *Oholibamah* [herself the illegitimate child of an adulterous union (see below)] adulterously cohabited with *Eliphaz*. *Midrash Shocher Tov* perceives her name to imply: She made her tent (*Oholah*) like an illegitimate alter (*bamah*) upon which to act adulterously.]

– בת־עֲנָה בְּתִצְבֹּעַן הַחִיטִי (v. 4)
Daughter of Anah, daughter of Zibeon the Hivvite.

[*Anah* was a man's name, so the phrase cannot mean: *daughter of Anah* who was the *daughter of Zibeon*. The phrase implies, rather, that *Oholibamah* was the daughter of two fathers!] Clearly the verse cannot mean that *Oholibamah* literally had two fathers! Furthermore, *Anah* himself is mentioned in verse 24 as the *son of Zibeon*. The phraseology of our verse accordingly teaches that *Zibeon* adulterously cohabited with his daughter-in-law, *Anah's* wife (who is unidentified), resulting in the birth of *Oholibamah*. [I.e., *Oholibamah* is called the *daughter of Anah* because *Anah's* wife bore her; she was publicly known as *Anah's* daughter because she was raised in his home, but the Torah reveals that she was actually

fathered by her adulterous grandfather, *Zibeon*. Accordingly all their descendants were בני מזמורת (*children of illegitimate birth* (*Rashi*)).

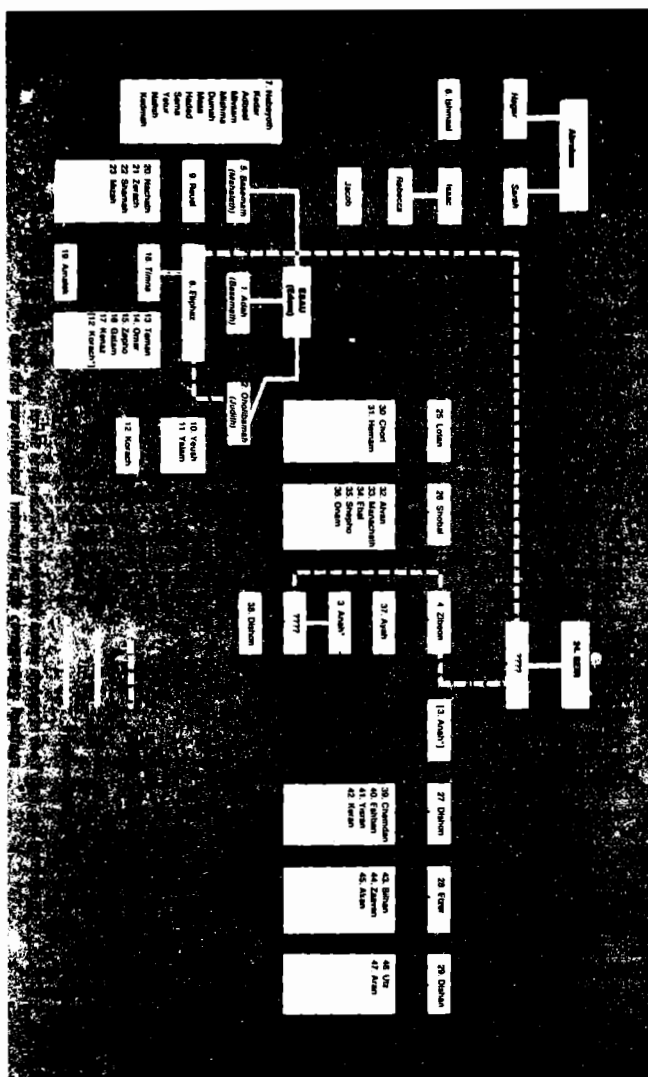
There is an additional discrepancy inasmuch as in v. 20 *Anah* is identified as *Zibeon's* brother, while further in v. 24 we find that he was *Zibeon's son*! This indicates, as *Rashi* explains there, that *Zibeon* committed incest with his own mother [*Seir's* wife], fathering *Anah* [who is thus described as *Zibeon's* putative brother since he was born of the same mother, while the Torah also reveals to us that in truth he was *Zibeon's son* since *Zibeon* fathered him incestuously.]

Mizrachi observes that the Sages assume *Zibeon* to have been the adulterer although the following interpretation would seem to be just as acceptable: *Seir* committed adultery with *Zibeon's* wife. Their child, *Anah*, could be described both as *Zibeon's* son, since *Zibeon's* wife bore him, and *Zibeon's* brother since his father, *Seir*, begot him.

– We do not make this suggestion, since the Sages assume that כלול בקולקל *we may assume that a wicked deed was done by a wicked person*; and if two wicked acts took place, he presumably committed them both. We already know from the case of *Oholibamah* that *Zibeon* adulterously cohabited with his daughter-in-law, *Anah's* wife, but we have no evidence that *Seir* ever committed such an abomination. Therefore, we assume that *Anah* was born of *Zibeon's* incestuous act, not *Seir's*. Similarly, in the case of the illegitimate birth of *Oholibamah*, the Sages assume that the known adulterer, *Zibeon*, committed adultery with his daughter-in-law, *Anah's* wife, but not that *Anah* committed incest with his mother, *Zibeon's* wife. They do not conjecture otherwise since most other people – presumably including *Seir*, regarding whom we have no external evidence to the contrary – are virtuous in this respect, and there is less reason to assume that two people acted adulterously rather than to assume that one person did so twice.

[Cf. *Tosafos, Bava Basra* 115b s.v. מלמד.]

In v. 20 *Zibeon* and *Anah* are described as *Horites*. The *Talmud* [*Shabbos* 85a] explains the term *Hivvite* here to refer not to the proper noun but



וַיִּשְׁלַח ה' יִשְׁמָעֵאל אֶחָת נְבוֹיֹת: וַתֵּלֶד עֵדָה לְעֵשָׂו
 אֶת-אֱלִיפָז וּבִשְׁמֹת יִלְדָה אֶת-רֵעוּאֵל:
 וְאֶהְלִיבָמָה יִלְדָה אֶת-יֵעִישׁ וְאֶת-יַעֲלֹם
 וְאֶת-קָרַח אֵלֶּה בְנֵי עֵשָׂו אֲשֶׁר יִלְדוּ-לוֹ
 בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: וַיָּקַח עֵשָׂו אֶת-נָשָׁיו וְאֶת-

to the Horite's agricultural ability to merely taste earth בָּחֲנָא, like a snake, and determine the most appropriate crop to cultivate on a particular soil. [Thus Talmudically, our passage would be rendered: '... (publicly presumed to be) the daughter of Anah (but in reality, the illegitimate) daughter of Zibeon, the serpentine soil taster. See Tosafos there s.v. הַחֲנִי, and Maharsha.]

Sefer HaYashar reconciles many difficulties by recording that the Horites were descendants of the Hivvites. R' Hoffmann notes, additionally, that the term Hittite — as it occurs in *Joshua* 1:4 — is a general term for Canaanite — embracing also the Hivvites, and hence the Horites.

Cf. Ramban to *Deut.* 2:10 who maintains — citing our verses — that the Horite is identical with the Hivvite, Canaanite nation. Horite is derived from חור, the [hole of] the asp (*Isaiah* 11:8) and Hivvite from snake. The terms [whose letters ו and ח interchange but preserve the meaning] were chosen to suggest the treacherous, snake-like nature of this people.

[In effect, there is accordingly no discrepancy between the Rabbinic interpretation and the simple sense of the text.]

3. (5-6) בִּשְׁמֹת בְּתִישְׁמָעֵאל — Basemath, daughter of Ishmael.

In 28:9 she is called Mahalath (from מחל, forgive). Midrash *Shmuel* states that three persons are forgiven their past sins: he who becomes a proselyte, he who is elevated to a higher status, and he who marries. The latter is deduced from this case inasmuch she was

called [by the descriptive name] Mahalath [lit., forgiveness] at the time she and Esau were married (*Rashi*; see footnote to p. 1171 where the same thought is cited from *Yerushalmi Bikkurim* 3:3).

Ramban however, continuing his commentary above, maintains that both were her proper names. Her original name, Mahalath, was repugnant since in Hebrew it suggests choli, sickness. Esau therefore renamed her Basemath, which is a pleasant name derived from the word *besamim*, spices, after his first wife, Basemath daughter of Elon. This indicated that Ishmael's daughter was beloved to him since she was of his own family and was not of the the Canaanites who were evil in the eyes of Isaac his father [28:8].

(7) אֶחָת נְבוֹיֹת — Sister of Nebayoth.

[As her older brother], he gave her in marriage to Esau after Ishmael's death; hence she is described by her relationship to him (*Rashi*; *Megillah* 17a; cf. *comm.* to 28:9).

4. (8) אֶת-אֱלִיפָז — [And] Adah bore to Esau Eliphaz.

There are traditions that Eliphaz, Esau's firstborn, was the most deserving of his children. *Rashi* mentions [on 29:11] that 'he had been raised on Isaac's knee and had refused to obey his father's command to kill Jacob.'

Some identify him as Eliphaz the Temanite [*Job* 2:11, 4:1] who prophesied in the time of his friend

Ishmael, sister of Nebayoth.

⁴ *Adah bore to Esau Eliphaz; Basemath bore Reuel; and Oholibamah bore Yeush, Yalom, and Korach. These are Esau's sons who were born to him in the land of Canaan.*

⁶ *Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and*

Job (*Sechel Tov*; see *comm.* to Job ad. loc.).

(א) וְבָשֶׁמֶת יָלְדָה אֶת רְעוּאֵל — [And] *Basemath bore Reuel.*

5. וְאֶחָדָם יָלְדָה אֶת יְעוּשׁ (י"ב: י"א) — *And Oholibamah bore Yeush, [and] Yalom, and Korach.*

This Korach was later [v. 16] included among the chiefs of Eliphaz [son of Adah, while here he is listed as a son of Esau through Oholibamah!] This alludes to the fact that this Korach was really the illegitimate child of Eliphaz, Esau's son, through an adulterous union with Oholibamah, his father's wife (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).

[In effect, then, as *Rashi* notes in v. 2 all Oholibamah's children were tainted by illegitimacy (בְּנֵי מְקוֹרוֹת).]

The Sages do not suggest that there were two Korachs referred to in this generation — the one mentioned here and the Eliphazite Chief in v. 16. Korach is absent from the list of Eliphaz's children in v. 11 which the Sages perceive as implying that Korach was not generally known to be Eliphaz's son since he was not borne by Eliphaz's wife as were Eliphaz's other children. Since, however, we find Korach among Oholibamah's children in this verse, and inexplicably among the chiefs of Eliphaz later in v. 16, we assume he was one and the same, and that accordingly he was the illegitimate offspring of an incestuous union between Eliphaz and his father's wife Oholibamah.

Although *Rashi* in *Sotah* 13a s.v. לִי does suggest that there were two Korachs in apparent contradiction to his commentary here, *Rashi* is really not contradicting himself. Rather, he cites two differing Midrashic traditions. In *Sotah*, *Rashi*

explains the Talmudic opinion cited there that a total of thirty-six crowns were hung on Jacob's coffin [see on 50:10]. *Rashi's* interpretation to our verse — that there was one Korach who was illegitimate — is based on *Midrash* reflecting another tradition (*Mizrachi*).

[Note: This Edomite Korach is not to be confused with Levi's great-grandson Korach — antagonist of Moses — in *Numbers* 16.]

Ibn Ezra maintains that there was but one Korach, and that in the literal sense there was no adultery implied in the repetition of his name here and in v. 16. He suggests that Korach was the youngest of Oholibamah's children [as indicated by the fact that he is here mentioned last]. Upon his mother's death, Adah raised him, which according to *Ibn Ezra* explains why he is mentioned among Adah's children in v. 16.

— אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עֵשָׂו אֲשֶׁר יָלְדוּלוּ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — *These [i.e., the aforementioned] are Esau's sons who were born to him in the land of Canaan.*

In the following verses, by contrast, we shall be told of the descendants who were born to him later in the land of Seir (*Hoffmann*).

6. Esau separates himself from Jacob.

וַיֵּקַח עֵשָׂו אֶת-נָשָׁיו וְאֶת-בָּנָיו וְאֶת בָּתָּיו — [And] *Esau took his wives, [and] his sons, [and] his daughters.*

This journey was undertaken after Jacob returned from Charan and settled in Canaan; possibly also after the death of their father (*Ramban*).

[Chronologically this second

בָּנָיו וְאֶת־בְּנֵיהֶם וְאֶת־כָּל־נַפְשֹׁת בֵּיתוֹ
וְאֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ וְאֶת־כָּל־בְּהֶמְתּוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־
קִנְיָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־
אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם יַעֲקֹב אֶחָיו: כִּי־הָיָה רִכּוּשׁ
רַב מִשְׁבֵּת יַחֲדוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלָה אֶרֶץ
מִגֹּרֵיהֶם לִשְׂאת אֹתָם מִפְּנֵי מִקְנֵיהֶם:

view would imply that about twenty-one years passed before Esau departed! (see *comm.* to 35:29).^[1]

That Esau licentiously thought more of women than of children is demonstrated by his giving precedence to his females. This is alluded to in that his wives are here mentioned before his sons and daughters. Jacob, by contrast, gave precedence to the children [see *Rashi* to 31:17]. The commentators cite this to illustrate a basic difference in attitude between the righteous and the wicked: The righteous marry in order to produce righteous offspring; they cherish their children as the purpose of marriage. Immoral people marry for physical pleasure; their children are secondary by-products [see also *comm.* to 32:17].

וְאֶת־כָּל־נַפְשֹׁת בֵּיתוֹ — *And all the members of his household* [lit. and all the souls of his house].

Although Esau's family consisted only of six [himself and his five sons] the Torah uses the plural term

נַפְשֹׁת, *souls*, of his house, since they each worshiped different gods, and were not unified. When Jacob's family came to Egypt, it consisted of seventy, yet the Torah [in 46:27] uses the singular term נֶפֶשׁ, *soul*, since they all served one God (*Rashi* to 46:27 citing *Vayikra Rabbah*).

וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ — *And [he] went to a land.*

— To another land (*Onkelos*).

— [An unspecified land]; to wherever he found a suitable spot to dwell (*Rashi*). [Ultimately, as we see in the next verse, he settled in Mount Seir (*Ramban* explaining *Rashi*).]

According to *Ramban's* own interpretation the phrase itself is elliptic, and connotes: into the land of Seir. The name of the place need not be mentioned since it has already been said that he dwelled in Seir [32:4], and because Seir is mentioned in the very next verse as his destination.

1. It is evident from previous Scriptural references associating Esau with Seir that Esau had moved to Seir earlier. Because of its excellent hunting grounds, he had gone there with a force of four hundred men [32:7] before Jacob's return, and dwelt in the plain referred to in 32:4 as the field of Edom. Apparently the inhabitants of the fortified mountain of Seir would not let him dwell higher up.

Esau's children and wives, however, remained behind in Canaan and Esau commuted between residences to honor his father and supply his needs. After Jacob returned to Canaan — and presumably after Isaac's death — Esau vacated the land permanently because he knew that Canaan was the inheritance of his brother.

He therefore moved his family to his original dwelling place in the field of Edom, and eventually conquered the whole region from the Horites — including Mount Seir — making it his principal residence. This remained Esau's possession by Divine sanction [see *Deut.* 2:5] (*Ramban*).

all the members of his household — his livestock and all his animals, and all the wealth he had acquired in the land of Canaan — and went to a land because of his brother Jacob. ⁷ For their wealth was too abundant for them to dwell together, and the land of their sojourns could not support them because of their

מפני יעקב אחיו — Because of his brother Jacob.⁽¹⁾

This phrase informs us that Esau's journey took place after Jacob's return from Charan (Ramban).

[The next verse tells us the apparent reason, *why*, in fact, they could not both live side by side in the same land: — the land was unable to support them because of their abundant livestock. However, the commentators infer an underlying reason for the fact that Esau, rather than Jacob, was the one who sought a new land]:

Because of his brother Jacob, i.e., because Esau feared Jacob, his brother, having heard of the military strength displayed by the family in Shechem (Targum Yonasan; Midrash HaGadol).

Since Jacob had purchased the birthright, he was Isaac's heir. Therefore he remained in the ancestral land, while Esau sought another country (Rashbam).

The Midrash explains that Esau left on account of the obligation involved in the decree [15:13] that there would be a long, hard exile as strangers in a foreign land before

Isaac's descendants would inherit Canaan. Esau reasoned: 'I will leave here. I want no part either of the gift of this land or the payment of the obligation of going into exile for it.' Another reason Esau left was because he was ashamed of having sold his birthright (Rashi).

In reward for having cleared out his utensils [i.e. departing from the land] because of his brother Jacob, God granted Esau one hundred provinces from Seir to Magdiel; and Magdiel is Rome (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 38; cf. comm. to v. 43).

כִּי הָיָה רַבּוּשָׁם כִּכ מִשְׁכַּת יַחְדּוֹ. — For their wealth was too abundant for them to dwell together.

Therefore, in light of the above, Esau felt compelled to vacate in the favor of Jacob. He knew that Isaac had bequeathed the land to Jacob, and perhaps he also knew that he himself was to inherit Mount Seir [see Deut. 2:5] (Radak).

וְלֹא יָכְלָה אֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵיהֶם לִשְׂאֵת אֹתָם — מפני מקניהם — And the land of their sojourns could not support them because of their livestock.

The land could not supply sufficient pasture for their cattle (Rashi).

1. The use of the word אחיו, his brother, indicates that Esau and Jacob lived as 'brothers', having wiped away the animosity of the past. But the spiritual and moral gulf between them was such that Esau could not feel comfortable living near Jacob. Still, had economic conditions been better in Canaan, Esau would not have left. But their flocks were so abundant that the land could not support them both.

That the Torah describes Esau as going אֶרֶץ אַחֵי, to [an unnamed] country, to rid himself of the spiritual and moral influence of his brother indicates that Esau's intention was simply to put distance between himself and Jacob (R' Hirsch).

וּשְׁלַח ח וַיֵּשֶׁב עֵשָׂו בְּהַר שְׁעִיר עֵשָׂו הוּא אֲדוֹם:
 לוֹמַח־יֵב ט וְאֵלֶּה תְּלֻדֹת עֵשָׂו אָבִי אֲדוֹם בְּהַר
 שְׁעִיר: י אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־עֵשָׂו אֲלִיפּוֹ בֶן־
 עֵדָה אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו רְעוּאֵל בֶּן־בְּשֶׁמֶת אֵשֶׁת
 יא עֵשָׂו: יִהְיוּ בְנֵי אֲלִיפּוֹ תִמָּן אוֹמֵר צִפּוֹ
 יב וְגַעֲתָם וְקִנְזוֹ: וְתִמְנֶעַ | הִיתָה פִּילָגֶשׁ
 לְאֲלִיפּוֹ בֶן־עֵשָׂו וְתִלְדַּר לְאֲלִיפּוֹ אֶת־

According to *Ramban, land of their sojourns* refers to the 'city of their sojourns' — Hebron — where Abraham and Isaac sojourned [35:27]. Canaan as a whole could certainly support a thousand times more than them. But when Esau realized he could no longer stay in his native city, he decided to leave the whole country to his brother and go his own way.

8. וַיֵּשֶׁב עֵשָׂו בְּהַר שְׁעִיר. — So [lit. and] *Esau settled on Mount Seir*.

— He successfully captured the fortified mountain from the original inhabitants, the Horites, descendants of Seir. Esau gained the territory by Divine sanction, as it is written [Deut. 2:22]: *as He did for the children of Esau that dwell in Seir when He destroyed the Horites from before them*; and [Deut. 2:5]: *Because I have given Mount Seir to Esau for a possession* (*Ramban v. 6*; see footnote there).

In his *comm.* to 34:13, *Ramban* mentions that the Torah did not explicitly mention Esau's wars with the Horites because his victory was a 'hidden miracle'. [I.e., one could deny the miraculous nature of the event, attributing it not to the clear intervention of God, but to one's own military prowess.]

Sforno [to v. 2 and 32:4] observes that *Oholibamah* was a descendant of Seir the Horite, and offers that

Esau had obtained the site as a dowry when he married her. Thus, Esau went to Seir and dwelt on the mountain because of her.

[See also on 14:6.]

עֵשָׂו הוּא אֲדוֹם — *Esau who is Edom*.

Until this point only Esau himself was called Edom. Only when he established himself in Seir [next verse] and had grandchildren born there, were his offspring considered as a nation named Edom. In the next verse, therefore, he is called אָבִי אֲדוֹם, *ancestor of Edom* (*Haamek Davar*).

The fact that Esau is Edom is repeated three times in this chapter. Some take this repetition as a message that this significant group of nations stretching from East to West was descended from Esau, a son of Isaac and a grandson of Abraham. It was inevitable that ideas concerning the existence of God and certain Abrahamic moral principles were spread among these nations, thanks to the heritage of their founder. This is true despite the fact that these principles were surely watered down to make them popular and acceptable. Accordingly, this chapter intends to outline a vast historical picture of the cultural evolution within humanity (*R' Munk*).

Other sages maintain, to the contrary, that the Torah is emphasizing hereby that Esau's abundant progeny — notwithstanding their apparent superiority in this world — comprise these na-

livestock. ⁸ So Esau settled on Mount Seir; Esau who is Edom.

⁹ And these are the progeny of Esau, ancestor of Edom, on Mount Seir. ¹⁰ These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz, son of Adah, Esau's wife; Reuel, son of Basemath, Esau's wife.

¹¹ The sons of Eliphaz were: Teman; Omar; Zepho; Gatam; and Kenaz. ¹² And Timna was a concubine of Eliphaz, son of Esau, and she bore Amalek

tions making up the kingdom of Edom who are destined to ultimately disappear in Messianic times (cf. *Or HaChaim; Abarbanel*). [Cf. v. 19.]

9. Esau's descendants in Seir.

וְאֵלֶּה תְּלִדוֹת עֵשָׂו אָבִי אֲדוֹם בְּהָר שֵׁעִיר — And these are the progeny of Esau, ancestor of Edom, on Mount Seir.

I.e. the [following are the] progeny (תְּלִדוֹת) which Esau's children begot after he went to Seir (*Rashi*). [The children born to Esau while still in Canaan were listed in verses 2-5. The following were his grandchildren (*Abarbanel*).]

Esau's descendants born in Seir are listed here because it was they who vanquished the Horites and established Edom's sovereignty over Mount Seir. See *Deut.* 2:22 (*Sforino*).

10. אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי עֵשָׂו — These are the names of Esau's sons.

First the sons already born to Esau in Canaan are again mentioned. Then the offspring whom his sons begot while in Seir are enumerated, for Esau himself begot no more offspring while in Seir. The listing then reverts to his children by Oholibamah [v. 14], however, none of her grandchildren are named. This is because only the chiefs are listed, and while Oholi-

bamah's children were chiefs, apparently her grandchildren were not (*Radak*).

[*Radak* apparently pursues this interpretation since it is only reasonable to assume that Oholibamah had grandchildren through at least some of her three sons, but that they were not, for some reason, counted as chiefs.]

Abarbanel suggests that it is conceivable that no grandchildren were yet born to her at that time, or that they were all girls.

11. Esau's genealogy through Eliphaz son of Adah:

— תִּמְנָן אוֹמָר צֶפֶו וְגָטָם וְקִנִּז —
Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam and Kenaz.

12. Amalek: Eliphaz's son by his concubine.

וְחַמְנֵעַ הָיְתָה פִּילְגֶשׁ לְאֵלִיפָז בֶּן־עֵשָׂו (18) — [And] Timna was a concubine of Eliphaz, son of Esau.

This is stated [although the women of Esau's other sons are not mentioned (*Ramban*)] to emphasize that Abraham was held in such esteem that people were eager to attach themselves to his descendants. As we see in v. 22, Timna was a descendant of chiefs; she was the sister of Lotan who was one of the chiefs of Seir [Lotan was a son of Seir himself (v. 20)], a Horite who lived there from ancient times. Yet she was so anxious to marry a descendant of Abraham that she

וּשְׁלַח לוֹיִגִיד יִי עֶמְלֶק אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עֵדָה אִשְׁתּוֹ עָשׂוֹ וְאֵלֶּה
בְּנֵי רְעוּאֵל נָחַת וְזָרַח שָׁמָּה וּמִזָּה אֵלֶּה
יִי הָיוּ בְּשֵׁמֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ עָשׂוֹ וְאֵלֶּה הָיוּ בְּנֵי

said to Eliphaz: 'If I am unworthy to become your wife, let me at least be your concubine!' (*Rashi*).

Cf. *Sanhedrin* 99b: Timna was a royal princess, being the sister of Lotan, an uncrowned prince. She desired to convert to Judaism. She went to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but they would not accept her. So she went and became the concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son, saying: 'I would rather be a servant to one of this people than a noblewoman of another nation.' From her descended Amalek who afflicted Israel. Why so? — Because they [i.e. the Patriarchs] should not have rejected her.^[1]

[This was one of the passages that Manassah, son of King Hezekiah, would expound in a mocking fashion. See *footnote* to v. 22; s.v. נִחְזָקוֹת לְיוֹסֵף תַּמְנֵן.]

Rashi [from *Tanchuma*] continues that in *I Chronicles* 1:36 Timna is counted as one of Eliphaz's children! This intimates that Eliphaz cohabited adulterously with Seir's wife and from this union Timna was born. When she grew up she became Eliphaz's concubine. We are therefore told that *Lotan's sister was Timna* [v. 22], Lotan being the son of Seir, thus intimating in a veiled manner that Timna was Seir's daughter. She is not more explicitly listed among the children of

Seir because she was Lotan's *maternal*, but not *paternal* sister. [I.e., she was only Seir's putative daughter through the adulterous act of his wife.]

[It is not clear, however, why Ohelibamah (see v. 2) is explicitly called Anah's daughter, although the circumstances were similar and she was Anah's 'daughter' only in the sense that his wife bore her but from another man. In the case of Timna, the circumstances were the same, yet the Torah refrains from specifically calling her Seir's 'daughter', but nevertheless alludes to these circumstances by referring to her as 'Lotan's sister.' The reason *Rashi* advances appears difficult in this context רַצִּי.]

Ramban suggests that Timna is specifically mentioned here as Amalek's mother to draw attention to the fact that Amalek — as the child of a concubine — was of lowly birth, not a true heir of Esau, and did not dwell with the other offspring of Esau on Mount Seir. Only the sons of the *true* wives were called Esau's seed, not those of the concubines. In this, Esau followed the practice of his grandfather, Abraham [see 21:10].^[2]

In a long exegetical dissertation — not within the scope of inclusion in this commentary — *Ramban* proceeds to expound on the verses in *Chronicles* cited by *Rashi* and on the discrepancies

1. In discussing this Talmudic tradition, R' Munk observes that once before, Abraham had been blamed for a failure to seek converts. *Nedarim* 32a records R' Yochanan as stating that Abraham was blameworthy for not insisting on his right to keep the captives whom he had freed and for not bringing them to a belief in God (cf. *comm.* to 14:22).

Although Abraham is the very model of the Jew who spread faith in God, he wanted to win people solely with truth, not by force and not because they saw some personal advantage in joining him. Therefore, he refused Timna's wish to convert, because she wanted only to join the prestigious family of Abraham, not to convert sincerely (*Rashi* to v. 20). For a similar reason, he refused to keep the prisoners of war and convert them. He felt that such a conversion would be carried out under duress, and would be lacking in religious conviction.

In both cases, however, he erred. He should have realized that the truth of his faith could conquer even reluctant minds. And so, Israel paid the consequences. Amalek, son of the rejected Timna, became the arch enemy of the Jews.

to Eliphaz. — These are the children of Adah, Esau's wife.

¹³ And these are the sons of Reuel: Nachath; Zerach; Shamah; and Mizah. — These are the children of Basemath, Esau's wife.

between the listings. Seeking to avoid *Rashi's* approach of attributing to them adulterous relationships and illegitimate births, *Ramban* advances several possible alternative interpretations to reconcile divergencies in the chronologies. Among these suggested conclusions are (a) that Eliphaz consorted with Seir's wife after the death of Seir, making Timna in effect a legitimate child; when she grew up Eliphaz took her as a concubine, this being permissible to a gentile (see *Sanhedrin* 55b). [This view, which looks upon Eliphaz more favorably, fits in well with some other traditions regarding Eliphaz, Esau's firstborn, who, as *Rashi* to 29:11 observes, 'had been raised on Isaac's knee and had refused to obey his father's command to kill Jacob.' He was, according to the Sages, the friend of Job whose ideological discussions are recorded in that Book (see *Rashi* on Job 4:1).]; (b) there are two Timna's — one male and one female; (c) Korach was the youngest (legitimate) son of Oholibamah; upon his mother's death Adah raised him [following *Ibn Ezra*; cf. v. 5].

[However, cf. *Mizrachi* cited in v. 1 who defends *Rashi's* Talmudic approach of emphasizing whatever suggestions of the illegitimacy and immorality within Esau's family, though not readily discernable from the literal meaning of the Text.]

2. *Ramban* continues that in general, we have been commanded not to abhor descendants of Esau, nor to take their land [see *Deut.* 23:8 and 2:5]. This applies to those who dwell in Seir and are known as Edomites.

However, our verse comes to specially exclude *Amalek's* line from this interdiction. He was a son of a concubine, and not part of Esau's inheritance. In fact, regarding *Amalek* we have been commanded to abhor him and utterly blot out his name (*Deut.* 25:19).

According to *Abarbanel*, *Amalek* as an Edomite-relative, was initially included in the designation of Edomites who were not to be abhorred. It was only after his dastardly, cruel attack against the Israelites that he was singled out for extermination. [See *Rambam*, *Moreh Nevuchim* cited in footnote to v. 20, and *Ikkarim* 2:25.]

וְחָלָד לְאֵלִיפָז אֶת־עַמְלֵק — And she bore *Amalek* to Eliphaz.

— Who later afflicted Israel [see *Exod.* 18:8]. This was in punishment for the Patriarchs having rejected his mother from converting (*Sanhedrin* 99b; see *comm.* and footnote above).

אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עֲדָה אִשָּׁת עֵשָׂו — These are the children [i.e. grandchildren] of Adah, Esau's wife.

13. Esau's genealogy through Reuel son of Basemath.

נָחַת וְזֶרַח שָׁמָּה וּמִזָּה — Nachath, Zerach, Shamah and Mizah.

14. Esau's sons through Oholibamah.

According to *Ramban* [v. 9] the justification for mentioning the birth of Esau's sons Eliphaz and Reuel in verse 10, was in order to list the offspring born to them in Seir, which is the primary reason for this genealogy. Although Oholibamah's children had no offspring in Seir, they are gratuitously included in order to complete the list of Esau's children. Furthermore, they became chiefs, and all the

אֶהְיִבְמָה בִּתְעֵנָה בִּתְצַבְעֹן אֵשֶׁת
 עָשׂוּ וַתֵּלֶד לָעָשׂוּ אֶת־יְעִישׁ וְאֶת־יַעֲלָם
 וְאֶת־קָרַח: אֵלֶּה אֲלוּפֵי בְנֵי־עָשׂוּ בְנֵי
 אֲלִיפֹז בְּכוֹר עָשׂוּ אֲלוּף תִּימָן אֲלוּף
 אוֹמֵר אֲלוּף צָפוֹ אֲלוּף קִנּוֹ: אֲלוּף־קָרַח
 אֲלוּף גַּעְתָּם אֲלוּף עֲמֶלֶק אֵלֶּה אֲלוּפֵי
 יי אֲלִיפֹז בְּאֶרֶץ אֲדוֹם אֵלֶּה בְנֵי עֵרָה: וְאֵלֶּה
 בְּנֵי רְעוּאֵל בֶּן־עָשׂוּ אֲלוּף נַחַת אֲלוּף
 זֶרַח אֲלוּף שִׁמְהָ אֲלוּף מִזָּה אֵלֶּה אֲלוּפֵי
 רְעוּאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ אֲדוֹם אֵלֶּה בְנֵי בִשְׁמַת
 יח אֵשֶׁת עָשׂוּ: וְאֵלֶּה בְנֵי אֶהְיִבְמָה אֵשֶׁת
 עָשׂוּ אֲלוּף יַעֲוֹשׁ אֲלוּף יַעֲלָם אֲלוּף קָרַח
 אֵלֶּה אֲלוּפֵי אֶהְיִבְמָה בִּתְעֵנָה אֵשֶׁת
 יט עָשׂוּ: אֵלֶּה בְנֵי־עָשׂוּ וְאֵלֶּה אֲלוּפֵיהֶם
 °שְׁבִיעִי כ הוּא אֲדוֹם: °אֵלֶּה בְנֵי־שְׁעִיר

chiefs — even those not born in Seir — are enumerated.

[Contextually perhaps this verse should have followed immediately after verse 10 where Esau's sons through his other wives Adah and Basemath respectively had been listed. However as noted there, in each of the former cases the verses went on to list Esau's grandchildren through those sons, while in the case of Oholibamah no grandchildren are enumerated, and so the listing of Esau's children through those were left for last. Possibly also, Oholibamah's children were tainted by illegitimacy (בְּנֵי מְמוֹרוֹת), and Korach himself was additionally illegitimate having been the offspring of an adulterous relationship between Oholibamah and Eliphaz.]

15. The chiefs among Esau's descendants:

The chiefs of Eliphaz; Adah's descendants.

אֵלֶּה אֲלוּפֵי בְנֵי־עָשׂוּ — *These are the chiefs of the children of Esau.*

The translation *chief* follows Rashi who explains אֲלוּף to mean *head of a clan*. [Cf. *Sanhedrin* 99b: an 'alluf' is an uncrowned ruler. Cf. *Ramban* v. 40. See also *comm.* to *Num.* 20:14].

16. אֲלוּף קָרַח — Chief Korach.

Although Korach is originally listed in verse 5 as Oholibamah's son, he is listed here among the chiefs of Eliphaz since Korach was Eliphaz's illegitimate child through Oholibamah (Rashi to v. 5).

[In v. 18 Korach is listed again among the chiefs of Oholibamah. As noted in the *comm.* to verse 5, according to the *Midrash* there

¹⁴ And these were the sons of Oholibamah, daughter of Anah, daughter of Zibeon, Esau's wife: She bore to Esau Jeush, Jalom, and Korach.

¹⁵ These are the chiefs of the children of Esau. The descendants of Esau's firstborn Eliphaz: Chief Teman, Chief Omar, Chief Zepho, Chief Kenaz. ¹⁶ Chief Korach, Chief Gatam, and Chief Amalek; these are the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom — These are the descendants of Adah.

¹⁷ And these are the descendants of Reuel, Esau's son: Chief Nahath, Chief Zerah, Chief Shammah, and Chief Mizah; these are the chiefs of Reuel in the land of Edom. — These are the descendants of Basemath, Esau's wife.

¹⁸ And these are the descendants of Oholibamah, Esau's wife: Chief Jeush, Chief Jalam, and Chief Korach. — These are the chiefs of Oholibamah, daughter of Anah, Esau's wife. ¹⁹ These are the children of Esau, and these are their chiefs; he is Edom.

²⁰ These are the sons of Seir, the Horites, who were

was only one Korach; according to an opinion in *Sotah* 13a, there were indeed two [Korachs.]

אלוף צמלק — Chief Amalek.

— [By his concubine Timna; see v. 12.]

17. The chiefs of Reuel; Basemath's descendants.

18. The chiefs of Oholibamah.

אלוף קרח — Chief Korach.

[See *comm.* to v. 16.]

19. אלה בני עשו ואלה אלוֹפֵיהֶם הוא אֶדוֹם — These are the children of Esau, and these are their chiefs; he is Edom.

— In this genealogy lay the roots of Edom, which evolved into Rome, the perpetual enemy of Israel

(*Lekach Tov*; cf. v. 8).

20. The Seirite Genealogy.

(24) אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי-שַׁעִיר — These are the sons of Seir.

The word אֵלֶּה, *these*, is not preceded with a conjunctive ו, *and*, since the next part of the genealogy does not *add* to the preceding, but *contrasts* with it (R' Hoffmann).

We do not know Seir's ancestry. His genealogy is included in order to distinguish between his descendants and Esau's, for the Israelites would later be commanded concerning Esau's descendants [not to abhor them or take their land. Therefore it would be necessary to know the origins of the Seirite — Edomite families] (*Ibn Ezra*; see

וישלח לו כמכאב כא וְעָנָה: וְדָשׁוֹן וְאֶצֶר וְדִישָׁן אֱלֹהֵי אֲלוֹפֵי
 כב הַחֲרִי בְנֵי שְׁעִיר בְּאֶרֶץ אֲדוֹם: וַיְהִיו בְּנֵי-
 לוֹטָן חֲרִי וְהִימָם וְאַחֲזֹת לוֹטָן תִּמְנָע:

Rambam in footnote below).^[1]

According to *Rashi* [v. 24], it would have been unnecessary to list the genealogy of the Horites had the Torah not wished to mention Timna, thereby demonstrating the esteem in which Abraham was held [as *Rashi* explains in v. 12].

The Seirites were an ancient, populous nation who were the original inhabitants of the land of Seir [see 14:16]. The children of Esau succeeded them and dwelt in their stead by a miraculous event, for in effect God gave it to Esau's descendants as a heritage, just as He gave the other portions of the land to Israel. [See *Deut.* 2:5; *Ramban* to *Deut.* 2:10; and also *comm.* above, end of v. 2].

הַחֲרִי — *The Horites.*

The word חרי is familiarly translated *Horite*, by which name Seir's tribe was known. *Ibn Ezra*, citing its use as an adjective in *Jeremiah* 27:20, defines the word as signifying nobility. This is derived from the root חור as in *Isaiah* 19:9 where it means white — figuratively denoting nobility, in the same sense that black figuratively denotes soiled people, hence peasantry.

R' Hoffmann explains the derivation

of חרי to be from חור, *hole*, indicating that they were *cave-dwellers*. According to *Sefer HaYashar* the Horites were descendants of the Hivvites. [In this context cf. *Ramban* to *Deut.* 2:10 cited above, end of v. 2.]

The Sages in *Shabbos* 85a Aggadically interpret the word חרי [*Horite*] — by rearranging the letters — to allude to the Horites' agricultural expertise: they could determine which were the best plants for a particular plot by merely sniffing [מריחין] the earth. The word חוי [*Hivvite*] refers to their ability to taste the soil like a serpent [חניא] for the same purpose. [It is in this adjectival sense that Zibeon and Anah are referred to in v. 2 as 'Hivvites.' See *comm.* there.] Another view derives Horite from חורין, *free men*, denoting that they were 'freed' from their possessions [because Esau's descendants took it away from them.]

According to *Ramban*, however, 'Seir' in this context is not a name of a Horite, at all. Rather, it refers to the land, which was called the land of Seir. It was named after Esau, who was איש שער. [Seir] a hairy man [27:11]. Esau was referred to as Seir, and the land he conquered took his name from the time of his arrival. Even the native Horites then came to be identified as the people of Seir. The Torah, distinguishing between the *Horites* who lived in Seir and Esau's descendants who were the *Edomites* who lived in Seir [vs. 1-19].

1. *Ramban* writes in *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:50 that the Torah elaborates on Seir's genealogy because of one particular commandment. God commanded the Israelites to erase Amalek's name (*Deut.* 25:17-19), but the commandment applied to no other part of Esau's family. From the time Esau conquered the land of Seir, the Seirites were ruled by him, intermarried with his offspring, and eventually came to be given the name of Esau's strongest family — the Amalekites.

Had the families of Seir not been identified as non-Amalekites, they would have been killed along with Amalek. For this reason, the merciful Torah clarifies their genealogy and status. [See *Ramban* in footnote to v. 13 above.]

- 36** settled in the land: Lotan; Shobal; Zibeon; and Anah.
21-22 ²¹ Dishon; Etzer; and Dishan. — These are the chiefs of the Horites, the descendants of Seir in the land of Edom.
²² The sons of Lotan were: Chori and Hemam; Lotan's sister was Timna.

According to Ramban, the phrase would be rendered: *This is the Horite lineage of the land Seir.*

יְשֵׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ — Who were settled in [or, inhabitants of] the land.

— Before Esau came there. The Rabbis [*Shabbos* 85b] interpret the term יְשֵׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ, *inhabitants of the land*, to denote that they were expert in יְשׁוּבָה שֶׁל אֶרֶץ, *making the land habitable* [by skillful cultivation]. By just tasting the soil they could determine what crop should be planted in each area (*Rashi*; cf. *Shabbos* 85a cited above, s.v. הַחֹרִי).

The Torah mentions this to emphasize that God is the Master of the Land, and He bequeaths the earth to whomever He desires. The Seirites were the original inhabitants of Seir, and yet God caused them to surrender it to the descendants of Esau, for such was His will (*Radak*).

לוֹטָן וְשׁוֹבָל (25:26) וְצִבְעוֹן וְאַנָּה (3:4) — Lotan [and] Shobal [and] Zibeon and Anah.

[In v. 2 Zibeon and Anah are referred to as 'Hivvites.' See above, and *comm.* to v. 2 which also reconciles the Rabbinic view that Anah is identified with Beeri the Hittite in 26:34. See also *comm.* to v. 24

where Anah is listed among Zibeon's sons.]

21. (27-29) וְדִשׁוֹן וְעֶזְרָא וְדִישָׁן — [And] Dishon, [and] Etzer and Dishan.

בְּאֶרֶץ עֲדוֹם — In the land of Edom. I.e., in the land [of Seir] which would later be called the land of Edom. Midrashically, because of the redness of the soil, the land was named Edom [red] even then (*Haamek Davar*).

22. Lotan's sons.

חֹרִי וְהִמָּם — Chori and Hemam.

וְנָחֳחַת לוֹטָן תִּמְנָה — And Lotan's sister is Timna.

— The concubine of Eliphaz, mentioned in v. 12. *Rashi* writes in v. 24 that this entire Horite genealogy was recorded only to emphasize that Timna was of noble birth [her brother was a chief]. This demonstrates the esteem in which Abraham's descendants were held in that rulers sought to ally themselves in marriage to his descendants; notwithstanding her noble status, she was satisfied to become merely a concubine of Esau's sons. [See *Sanhedrin* 99b cited in v. 12.][¹]

In the literal sense, it is common

1. [This Talmudic explanation for the inclusion of this detail regarding Timna is noteworthy.] The *Talmud* [*ibid.*] records that Manasseh son of King Hezekiah would take pleasure in blasphemously expounding on the Torah to mock it. He once, remarked: 'Did Moses have nothing more important to put into the Torah than that Lotan's sister was Timna and that Timna was the concubine of Eliphaz?' ... A heavenly voice replied: 'You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your mother's son!' [*Psalms* 50:20]. The Sages proceeded to justify the inclusion of these facts by pointing out the esteem in which Abraham's grandson, Esau,

וישלח כג ואלה בני שובל עלון ומנחת ועיבל שפו
 לו-כג-כד כד ואונם: ואלה בני-צבעון ואיה וענה הוא
 ענה אשר מצא את-הימם במדבר
 ברעתו את-החמרים לצבעון אביו:

for the Torah to link daughters with their [eldest (*Rashbam*)] brothers. Comp.: *The sister of Tuval-Cain was Naamah* [4:22]; *sister of Laban* [25:20]; *sister of Nebayoth* [28:29]; *sister of Aaron* [Exod. 15:20]; *sister of Nachshon* [ibid. 6:23] (*Rashbam*; *Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*; *Ramban*).

[In each of the above cases, however, the commentators also perceive a deeper exegetical intent for the inclusion of such identifications in the Torah. See *comm.* to each case.]

In our case — as *Ramban* notes — *Timna* was identified as *Lotan's* sister rather than as *Seir's* daughter because in truth, although she was only *Lotan's* maternal sister, she was not *Seir's* daughter at all [but the illegitimate daughter of *Seir's* wife as explained in *v.* 12].

23. Shobal's sons.

(32-36) עלון ומנחת ועיבל שפו ואונם — *Alvan*, [and] *Manachath*, [and] *Ebal*, *Shepho* and *Onam*.

24. Zibeon's sons.

(37) ואיה וענה — [And] *Ayah*, and *Anah*.

The Hebrew reads *ואיה*, 'and' *Ayah*. *Rashi* comments that the *v* in

this case is superfluous and the phrase is equivalent to *ואיה וענה*. Similar cases in Scripture where a *v* occurs as a superfluous prefix are *Daniel* 8:13: *וְקִדְשָׁא וְחֹסֶד* [and] *holy and the host*; *Psalms* 86:7: *וְרֶכֶב וְסוֹס* [and] *rider and horse*.

Ramban concurs and adds other examples such as *II Sam.* 15:34 *וְאִי וְאִי* [and] *I*; *I Chron.* 5:24: *וְרֹאשֵׁי בָתֵּיהֶם* [and] *these were the heads of their father's houses*; *וְעֶפְרַיִם וְיִשָּׂשכָר* [and] *Ephraim and Issachar*.

[Some translators attempt to account for the superfluous *v* in passages such as ours by rendering: 'both *Ayah* and *Anah*', but this is apparently not *Rashi's* view.]

ואיה וענה — *The same* [lit. *he is*] *Anah*.

— He is the *Anah* mentioned above in verse 20. There is an apparent contradiction between the two verses: there he appears as *Zibeon's brother* [the putative son of *Seir*], while here he is called *Zibeon's son*! This teaches that *Zibeon* committed incest with his own mother and fathered *Anah* [see *comm.* to *v.* 2 s.v. *ענה*] (*Rashi*).

[According to this view, since *Zibeon* committed incest with his mother, the wife of *Seir* the *Horite*, the Torah lists

was held. They also record other lessons to be learned from the genealogies listed here, for nothing in the Torah is superfluous or unnecessary.

[See also *Rambam* cited in footnote to previous verse, who offers that by telling us that *Timna* was but a concubine the Torah thereby differentiates *Timna's* offspring — *Amalek* — from the rest of *Edom's* descendants.]

Furthermore, as *Ramban* writes in his introduction to *Chelek*, Fundamental 87: 'There is no difference between verses such as *And Timna was the concubine*, etc., ... *Lotan's sister was Timna*, and *I am HASHEM your God* or the *Shema*: ... All proceeded from the Almighty and all are God's perfect Torah — pure, holy and true.'

²⁴ These are the sons of Zibeon: Ayah and Anah — the same Anah who discovered the mules in the desert while he was pasturing the sheep for Zibeon, his father.

him in v. 20 among Seir's (putative) sons. Since he grew up in Seir's house, among Seir's other children, people would refer to him as 'Anah son of Seir', and Seir himself also thought Anah was his son. The Torah proceeds to refer to him a second time, here, as Zibeon's son to reveal to us the true fact.]

Although the flow of the passage is: *The same Anah who discovered etc.*, nevertheless the literal phrase *he is Anah* implies that Anah was previously described elsewhere as the one who discovered the mules, etc. Yet we find no such reference any place else in Scripture. Therefore Rashi pursues his interpretation that the phrase means: *he was the Anah* — mentioned above in v. 20 as Zibeon's brother and — *who [we are now told] discovered the mules in the desert.* The phrase *he was the Ahasuerus* in Esther 1:1 similarly implies: *he was the Ahasuerus* — mentioned elsewhere as a great king (*Gur Aryeh*).

Ramban, however, maintains that in the literal sense, there were two Anahs. The Torah identifies *this* Anah as *the same one who discovered the mules*, in order to differentiate him from the Anah in v. 20 who was his uncle the brother of his father Zibeon. The Anah in our verse was Ishmael's father-in-law mentioned in v. 2. Ramban accordingly maintains that the opinion in *Pesachim* 54a [followed by Rashi] that there was only one [illegitimate] Anah, is an Agadic interpretation which does not reflect the plain meaning of Scripture.

[However, see *Mizrachi* cited in v. 1 who encourages such derogatory interpretations of this genealogical table. Cf. *Haamek Davar*.]

... אֲשֶׁר מָצָא אֶת הַיְּמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר — Who discovered [lit. found] the mules in

the desert while he was pasturing the sheep for Zibeon, his father.

— I.e., he crossbred a donkey and a female horse and the result was a mule. Being himself born of an illegitimate union [between Zibeon and Zibeon's mother], he introduced a 'tainted' animal [i.e. born of a heterogeneous breeding] into the world [thus intimating that 'evil begets evil'] (*Rashi*; *Midrash*; *Pesachim* 54a).

The idea is that Anah was the first to discover that a donkey and a mare could be crossbred though they were dissimilar [heterogeneous]. Anah made this discovery while he was pasturing his father's donkeys in the desert. Many of the donkeys were in heat, seeking females. He mated them with female horses, and they bore mules. This discovery was considered so wise by his contemporaries that Anah came to be famous because of it. The Torah therefore so described him (*Ramban*).

Another view in the *Midrash* suggests that he mated a male horse with a female donkey.

According to an alternative Talmudic opinion [*Pesachim* 54a], mules already existed at the time of Adam when a kind of Divine instinct entered into Adam and he mated two heterogeneous animals. The implication is that this art was forgotten. Though wild mules existed, and were often domesticated, no one knew how to breed them until Anah made this discovery (*Emek Yehoshua*).

The above also answers the implication in *Rashi* 26:13 that mules already existed in the time of Isaac.

Such crossbred offspring remain

וּשְׁלַח כה וְאֵלָה בְּנֵי־עֲנָה דִּשָּׁן וְאֹהֲלִיבָמָה בִּתְּ-
 לוֹמְכָה־ל כו עֲנָה: וְאֵלָה בְּנֵי דִשָּׁן חֲמִדָּן וְאַשְׁכָּן וִיתְרָן
 כז וּבָכָרָן: אֵלָה בְּנֵי־אֶצֶר בִּלְהָן וְזַעֲזָן וְעֶקְזָן:
 כח־כט אֵלָה בְּנֵי־דִישָׁן עֹזִץ וְאַרְזָן: אֵלָה אֱלוֹפֵי
 הַחֲרִי אֱלוֹף לֹטָן אֱלוֹף שׁוּבָל אֱלוֹף
 ל צִבְעֹן אֱלוֹף עֲנָה: אֱלוֹף דִּשָּׁן אֱלוֹף אֶצֶר
 אֱלוֹף דִּישָׁן אֵלָה אֱלוֹפֵי הַחֲרִי לְאַלְפֵיהֶם
 בָּאֶרֶץ שְׁעִיר:

sterile, however, since God is not pleased with this effort. They can only be produced by crossbreeding a horse and a donkey. Also, crossbred animals were not included in the blessing of פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ, *be fruitful and multiply* pronounced on those who left the Ark; they therefore are incapable of bearing young (*Chizkuni*). [See also *Rambam, Hilchos Melachim* 10:6.]

Ramban proceeds to note that *Onkelos* translates יָמִים as (*mighty*) *men*. He explains that once, when Anah was pasturing his father's donkeys in the desert, he was attacked by marauders from a giant-like nation called *Eimim* [see *Deut.* 2:10] who wanted to steal his father's donkeys. But Anah overcame them single-handedly. Accordingly, the word מָצָא [*found*] in this verse would have the sense of *over-take*, as in *Psalms* 21:9; *II Sam.* 38. Or, it means *found* in the usual sense and refers to how *he came upon these warriors in the desert ...* and nevertheless, was saved. He later became famous for his prowess.

Thus, *Yemim* would be synonymous with *Eimim*, the *א* and *י* being interchangeable letters as in *Isaiah* 61:6 where תְּתַמְּרוּ=תְּתַמְּרוּ (*R' Bachya*).

The reason mules are called יָמִים [phonetically associated with אָמִים, *dreaded*

ones], is because of the dread associated with the fear of injury of a white mule, the wound from which is incurable (*Rashi* from *Chullin* 7b).

25. Anah's children.

— דִּשָּׁן (38) וְאֹהֲלִיבָמָה (2) בִּתְּ-עֲנָה
Dishon and Oholibamah daughter of Anah.

The same Anah mentioned above *Ramban* who maintains that there were two Anahs (*Haamek Davar*).

26. Dishon's sons.

— [And] these are the sons of Dishan [i.e., Dishon].

Dishan is identical with *Dishon* (27) *Seir's fifth son mentioned in v. 21*. Both spellings are interchangeable; it is of no consequence how the name is spelled, except when they both appear in one verse and a distinction between the two is necessary. That the Torah spells his name *Dishan* here is to differentiate him from *Dishon son of Anah* (38) mentioned in *v. 25*, for it would have otherwise appeared that the latter's children are being listed here, which is not the case (*Ramban*).

[*Ramban's* interpretation is supported by the parallel genealogy in *I Chron.* 1:41 where the father of these sons is given as *Dishon*.]

36 ²⁵ These are the sons of Anah: Dishon and
25-30 Oholibamah, daughter of Anah.

²⁶ These are the sons of Dishan: Chemdan;
Eshban; Yisran; and Keran.

²⁷ These are the sons of Etzer: Bilhan; Zaavan; and
Akan.

²⁸ These are the sons of Dishan: Utz and Aran.

²⁹ These are the chiefs of the Horites: Chief Lotan;
Chief Shobal; Chief Zibeon; Chief Anah; ³⁰ Chief
Dishon; Chief Etzer; and Chief Dishan. — These are
the chiefs of the Horites, chief by chief, in the land of
Seir.

(39-42) חֲמַדָּן וְעֶשְׁבָּן וְיִסְרָן וְכֶרֶן —
Chemdan, [and] Eshban, [and]
Yisran and Keran.

[Incidentally, in the parallel
genealogy in *I Chron.* 1:41, חֲמַרָּן,
Chemdan, appears as חֲמַרָּן,
Chamran. In the literal sense, the
letters ח and מ are interchangeable.
Cf. Reuel and Deuel in *Numb.*
1:14-2:14. *Rashi* in *I Chronicles*
ibid. offers a Midrashic interpreta-
tion that originally they were
חֲמֻרִים וְחֲמֻרִים, beloved and
desireable, like righteous people,
but ultimately they became ugly
like חֲמֻרִים, donkeys.]

27. Etzer's sons.

(43-45) בִּלְהָן וְזַאֲוָן וְאֶכָּן — Bilhan,
Zaavan and Akan.

28. Dishan's sons.

(46-47) עֹזְרִי וְאַרָּן — Utz and Aran.

29. The Horite Chiefs.

אֵלֶּה אֱלֹפֵי הָהָרִי לְאֶלְפֵיהֶם בְּאֶרֶץ שֵׁעִיר
— These are the chiefs of the
Horites, chief by chief [lit. to their
chiefs] in the land of Seir.

The apparently superfluous
listing of the Horite chiefs is given

by the Torah in order to show that
God conferred great honor upon
Isaac. Even to Esau, God gave a
heritage that had been the choice of
great and powerful chiefs (*Radak*).

31. The Edomite Kings.

The following illustrates the fulfill-
ment of Isaac's blessing to Esau: by
your sword you shall live [27:40].
Esau's descendants were victorious over
the descendants of Seir the Horite and
even established their own kings in the
Horite land ... At the same time,
however, from the genealogies of the
Edomite kings and the fact that various
cities of origin are listed, we see that the
Edomite crown did not go from father to
son as was the case later with the
Israelite crown (*Ramban*).

[However, see the alternate view in
35:11 where it is noted that the blessing
to Jacob kings shall descend from you
intimates that men fit to be kings will
descend from Jacob; Israel will not re-
quire strangers to become her kings nor
does Torah law permit them to
designate a stranger to reign over them
(see *Deut.* 17:15). By contrast, the
monarchy of Edom depended on
foreigners. It was elective or dependent
upon a particular individual to acquire
supremacy over the rest.]

Ramban, in *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:50

וישלח לא ואלה המלכים אשר מלכו בארץ אדום
לחל-לב לב לפני מלך-מלך לבני ישראל: וימלך
באדום בלע בן-בעור ושם עירו דנהבה:

maintains accordingly, that this listing of Edomite kings was recorded in the Torah as a reminder, in a sense, to Israel that they strictly adhere to the *mitzvah* of choosing only an Israelite as their monarch. It is as if they were being told to take warning from their brothers the descendants of Esau, whose kings were all foreigners; for never has a foreigner reigned over a nation without exercising a more or less tyrannical rule.

ואלה המלכים אשר מלכו בארץ אדום
לפני מלך מלך לבני ישראל — Now [lit. and] these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before a king reigned over [lit. to] the children of Israel.

The chapter goes on to list eight Edomite kings who reigned before the first Jewish king. The commentators offer two acceptable interpretations of the period under discussion, both of which are cited by *Ibn Ezra*: The eight Edomite kings reigned up to the time of Moses, in which case, this passage is a historical rendering of events that occurred before the Torah was given. The second view is that the passage is prophetic. It gives the names of eight Edomite kings who were destined to reign in future years, prior to Saul, the first Jewish king. In addition, *Ibn Ezra* cites and dismisses a blasphemous interpretation that was given currency in his time.

Ibn Ezra gives the view that the first Jewish king referred to by our

verse is Moses, who is described in *Deuteronomy* 33:5 as 'king' of Israel [see *Ibn Ezra* there]. Most commentators follow this interpretation. It is based on the principle that Moses, as the savior and leader of Israel, had the status of a king. Thus, the verse states that Edom had eight kings before the time of Moses when the Torah was committed to writing.¹⁾

Others subscribe to the view that this verse was a prophetic prognostication of Israel's later kingship which would begin with Saul and David.

Rashi apparently adopts to this view, for he comments — following the *Midrash* — that just as our chapter lists eight Edomite kings, so eight of Jacob's descendants emerged to suppress the Edomite monarchy. The eight Jewish kings were: Saul, his son Ish-bosheth, David, his son Solomon, his son Rehoboam, his son Abijah, his son Asa, and his son Jehoshaphat. Concerning Saul's time, it was written [*ibid.* 22:48]: *There was no king in Edom; a deputy [appointed by the Jewish monarchs] was king.* However, in the reign of Joram, Jehoshaphat's son, Edom rebelled, regained its independence, and crowned a new king over itself [*I Kings* 8:20].

Before Jacob and Esau were born, the prophecy was given that

1. Esau's destiny developed rapidly in accordance with the natural effects of the 'power of the sword'. While Jacob's descendants were still enslaved and leaderless in Egypt, Edom had already developed into a state with a line of royal dynasties. Joshua refers to this contrast (*Josh.* 24:4): *I gave Esau Mount Seir to possess it; but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt* (R' Hirsch).

36 ³¹ Now these are the kings who reigned in the land
31-32 of Edom before a king reigned over the
children of Israel: ³² Bela, son of Beor, reigned in
Edom, and the name of his city was Dinhabah.

[25:23]: לאם מלואם יאקץ, *The might shall pass from one regime to the other*, meaning that the two of them would never be mighty simultaneously. The *Midrashim* and commentators emphasize accordingly, that Edom's kings ceased to reign when Israel's monarchy was on the ascendancy.

Ibn Ezra quotes the false interpretation of *Yitzchaki* [the Spanish exegete *Yitzchak ben Yashush*] who maintained that this chapter was added to the Torah after the reign of *Yehoshafat*, when the names of the Edomite kings were known. But this interpretation is clearly unacceptable [since it is based on the blasphemous idea that our Torah was as yet incomplete in Moses' time] (*Yohel Or*). Furthermore, *Yitzchaki* is wrong also on historical grounds. Whoever hears him will laugh at him [a play on *Yitzchaki's* name יצחק, *he will laugh*]. God forbid even to suggest such an approach! For expressing such an opinion, his book should be burned! [*Ibn Ezra*].

That Esau's descendants produced eight kings before Israel had even one is viewed in the *Midrash* as Jacob's punishment for having abused himself eight times in chapter 32 by calling Esau 'my lord' (*Baal HaTurim*; see comm. to 32:5 s.v. עָבַד יַעֲקֹב).

The phrase does not necessarily imply that the Edomite monarchy existed until the kingdom of Israel was established. The last of these Edomite kings probably died before the Torah was given. [This explains how Moses was able to list the names of these kings. Apparently the Torah would not have listed the name of kings who were not

yet born since the Torah does not interfere this way with the natural order (*Ramban* end of v. 40).] Furthermore, they were old when they were crowned and did not live long (*Ramban*).

Rashbam adds that according to genealogical accounts in *Josephus* there were more than forty Edomite kings from Esau until David's time. [This confirms the interpretation that the eight kings listed here lived before Moses' time.]

32. בֶּלַע בֶּן-בְּעוֹר — *Bela, son of Beor.*

According to *Targum Yonasan*, this was Balaam son of Beor. *Ibn Ezra* disagrees, pointing out that Balaam was an Aramean [see *Numbers* 23:7], while it is apparent from our context that Bela was an Edomite. [Apparently, *Targum Yonasan* follows the opinion echoed in *Shemos Rabbah* 37:1 (see footnote below) that the Edomites chose foreigners as kings. Therefore, Bela was not necessarily an Edomite and could be identified with Balaam.]

Furthermore, the identification of Bela with Balaam would intimate that Balaam, who was alive in the days of Moses, enjoyed great longevity. Indeed, there is a Talmudic view [*Sotah* 11a], that Balaam was among the three who participated in Pharaoh's deliberations leading to the enslavement of the Jews (*R' David Feinstein*).

וְשֵׁם עִירוֹ דִּנְהָבָה — *And the name of his city was Dinhabah.*

— Dinhabah was his native city (*Rashi*). According to *Ramban*, these places were all Edomite cities [and all these kings were Edomite], but as the names indicate, the

ג וַיָּמָת בָּלַע וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתּוֹ יוֹכָב בֶּן־זֶרַח
ד מִבְּצָרָה: וַיָּמָת יוֹכָב וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתּוֹ חֹשֶׁם
ה מֵאֶרֶץ הַתִּימָנִי: וַיָּמָת חֹשֶׁם וַיִּמְלֹךְ
ו תַּחְתּוֹ הָדָד בֶּן־בְּדֹד הַמִּכָּה אֶת־מִדְיָן
ז בַּשָּׂדֶה מוֹאָב וְשֵׁם עִירוֹ עֵוִית: וַיָּמָת הָדָד
ח וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתּוֹ שְׁמֵלָה מִמְּשָׁרְקָה: וַיָּמָת
ט שְׁמֵלָה וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתּוֹ שָׂאוּל מִרַחְבּוֹת
י הַנֶּהָר: וַיָּמָת שָׂאוּל וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתּוֹ בַּעַל
יא חֲנָן בֶּן־עַכְבּוֹר: וַיָּמָת בַּעַל חֲנָן בֶּן־עַכְבּוֹר
יב וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתּוֹ הָדָד וְשֵׁם עִירוֹ פָּעוֹ וְשֵׁם
יג אֲשֶׁתוֹ מְהִיטְבָּאֵל בַּת־מִטְרָד בַּת מִי זָהָב:

Edomite crown did not pass from father to son.

33. וַיָּמָת בָּלַע — And Bela died.

[That all these kings are recorded as having died would tend to intimate that they died a natural death, and that the succession of kings was orderly and not the result of assassination.]

מִבְּצָרָה — From Bozrah.

According to Rashi following Pesikta, Bozrah was a Moabite city [cf. Jeremiah 43:24]. For producing a king of Edom it was destined to be punished along with that land [cf. Isaiah 34:6].

Ramban, consistent with his view, interprets that same verse in Isaiah 34:6 to denote that Bozrah itself was an Edomite city as were all the places mentioned here.

34. הַתִּימָנִי — The Temanites.

Ramban citing Obadiah 1:9: And your mighty men of Teman shall be dismayed that every one may be cut off from the Mount of Seir, maintains that Teman was an Edomite [it

was called Teman (=south) since Mount Seir lay to the south[=west] of Eretz Yisrael (Radak ad.loc.).]

Onkelos renders: מֵאֶרֶץ דְּרוֹמָא, from the land of the south.

Rashi is silent on our verse. However, from his comm. to Obadiah ibid. it is clear that he holds Teman was an Ishmaelite location. He interprets that verse to imply that out of fear of being massacred in Mount Seir, the mighty men of that region will attempt to flee to Teman, an Ishmaelite region, free from Edomite terror.

[Many identify Teman with the modern Yemen.]

35. הַמִּכָּה אֶת־מִדְיָן בַּשָּׂדֶה מוֹאָב — Who defeated [lit. strikes] the Midianites [lit. Midian] in the field of Moab.

This describes Hadad's military prowess (Ramban) ...

When Midian attacked Moab, this Edomite king came to Moab's aid and defeated Midian. From this we learn that Midian and Moab were enemies, but in the time of

³³ And Bela died, and Jobab son of Zerah, from Bozrah, succeeded him as king. ³⁴ And Jobab died and Husham, of the land of the Temanites, succeeded him as king. ³⁵ And Husham died, and Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated the Midianites in the field of Moab, succeeded him as king, and the name of his city was Avith. ³⁶ And Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah succeeded him as king. ³⁷ Samlah died, and Saul of Rechovos Nahar succeeded him as king. ³⁸ And Saul died, and Baal Hanan, son of Achbor, succeeded him as king. ³⁹ Baal Hanan, son of Achbor, died, and Hadar succeeded him as king. The name of his city was Pau and his wife's name was Mehetabel, daughter of Matred, daughter of Me-zahab.

Balaam they made peace in order to combine against Israel (Rashi).

[See Rashi to Numb. 22:4.]

37. מְרַחְבוֹת־הַנָּהָר — Of [lit. from] Rechovos Nahar [lit. Rechovos the river].

From Rechovos on the Euphrates River (Targum) [as distinct from the Rechovos associated with Isaac 26:22].

38. בַּעַל חֲנָן — Baal Hanan.

His place of origin is not mentioned. Either he came from the same place as his predecessor, Saul of Rechovos Nahar, or possibly he came from a place called Chanan, and as his name signifies he had been *בַּעַל חֲנָן*, the master of Chanan; subsequently he became king (Ramban).

39. הָדָר — Hadar.

In *I Chron.* 1:50 he is called Hadad, the ד and ה being interchangeable as noted above regarding Chemran — Chemdan in v. 26.

וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ מְהֵתָבֵל — And his

wife's name was Mehetabel.

'We do not know why in this case the wife is mentioned' (Radak).

— His wife is mentioned for it was due to her that he became a chief, inasmuch as she was the daughter of illustrious and wealthy parents [see below on Me-zahab] (Baal HaTurim).

[Radak apparently does not pursue this exegesis because, in following the literal sense, he does not interpret the name Me-zahab as signifying that he was wealthy.]

בֵּת מִיִּזְבֵּה — Daughter of Matred daughter of Me-zahab.

This phraseology is similar to [v. 2] daughter of Anah, daughter of Zibeon [where the Sages interpret that the mention of two fathers suggests that the child was born of an adulterous relationship. Hence the Torah lists two 'fathers' — the putative father in whose home the child was raised, and the individual whom the Torah identifies as the biological father]. Or [since in our verse] the Torah might be naming both her father and mother [unlike the case of v. 2 where from parallel

וּשְׁלַח מ לוח־מִגֵּד מִפְטִיר
 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת אֲלוֹפֵי עֶשָׂו לְמִשְׁפַּחָתָם
 לְמִקְמָתָם בְּשִׁמְתָם אֲלוֹף תִּמָּנָע אֲלוֹף
 עֲלוֹה אֲלוֹף יִתָּח: אֲלוֹף אֶהֱלִיבְמָה אֲלוֹף
 אֶלֶּה אֲלוֹף פִּינֹן: אֲלוֹף קִנֹּן אֲלוֹף תִּימָן
 אֲלוֹף מִבְּצָר: אֲלוֹף מַגְדִּיאל אֲלוֹף עֵירָם

genealogies, we know both names were those of *men*] (*Ibn Ezra*).

Radak agrees with the latter, but writes that it is not known why the names of both parents should be mentioned only in this case.

Possibly, *Matred* was the name of her *mother*, who in turn was the daughter of a woman named *Me-zahab*. Or *Matred* was her *father* who died young, and another man named *Me-zahab* raised her. Perhaps Scripture is noting that *Mehetabal* was *Matred's* daughter, and, therefore, was also the descendant ['daughter'] of the renowned personage *Me-zahab* (*Ralbag*).

Rashi explains the name *Me-zahab* to mean: מָהוּ זָהָב, *what is gold?* — He was so wealthy that gold had no value to him.

— *Matred* was originally a pauper who became so wealthy that he would go about boasting: 'What is gold, what is silver?' — it had no value to him (*Targum Yonasan*).

— He was so wealthy that gold flowed in his house like water [מִן זָהָב may be rendered literally as *waters of gold*] (*Abarbanel*).

According to *Onkelos*, the name denotes that he was a *goldsmith*.

Rashbam remarks that in pursuing the literal sense, he does not attach much importance to names. [Cf. *Radak* above.]

However, as the *Zohar* declares: 'The ways of the Torah are the ways of *HASHEM*, and the slightest word within it leaves its mark in the

supernal spheres of higher wisdom. Thus each word, each incident, each name in the Torah contains profound mysteries and should be expounded.'

40-41. The chiefs following the Edomite monarchy.

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת אֲלוֹפֵי עֶשָׂו לְמִשְׁפַּחָתָם לְמִקְמָתָם בְּשִׁמְתָם — Now [lit. and] *these are the names of the chiefs of Esau, by their families, by their regions, by their names.*

The phrase *by their regions by their names* indicates a change in the manner of naming the chiefs. The earlier group of kings [v. 15ff] used their own names. After *Hadad's* death and the end of the Edomite monarchy, the kingship ceased and the ensuing leaders were known as 'chieftains' of their respective regions. This new procedure is evident from *1 Chronicles* 1:52: *And Hadad (=Hadar) died and the chiefs of Edom were: The chief of Timna, etc. (Rashi).*

Ramban asserts that in earlier times all the Edomite brothers ruled simultaneously as a group. Those who are named from verse 40 onward ruled as individual chieftains *by their families, by their regions*; during each respective reign, each had absolute sovereignty over all the clans and regions. In effect they were kings, but were not formally known as such.

Some of those listed here were mentioned in the earlier list of

40-43 Now these are the names of the chiefs of Esau, by their families, by their regions, by their names: The chief of Timna; the chief of Alvah; the chief of Jetheth. ⁴¹ the chief of Oholibamah; the chief of Elah; the chief of Pinon; ⁴² the chief of Kenaz; the chief of Teman; the chief of Mivtzar; ⁴³ the chief of Magdiel and the chief of Iram.

chiefs [v. 15ff]. In time, apparently, they became the primary chiefs of the regions, for only they — and not other members of the earlier group — are enumerated in *I Chron. ibid.* (*Rashbam*).

Ibn Ezra maintains that these were the actual names of the chiefs. He explains that the chiefs enumerated here were the offspring of the chiefs enumerated above.

Only those famous personages who ruled in a particular region identifiable in Moses' days are mentioned here (*Ralbag*).

אלוף תמנע ... אלוף אהליבמה — The chief of Timna ... the chief of Oholibamah.

[The translation 'chief of Timna' rather than 'Chief Timna' follows the implication of *Rashi* above where he explains that unlike the listing of chiefs in v. 15ff, the following are not personal appellations. Rather, after the dissolution of the monarchy following Hadad's death, the chiefs were referred to by their regions. (Apparently, some of these regions took their names from earlier chieftains who ruled there, or from the patriarchs of the Edomite nation such as Timna and Oholibamah). Accordingly, our passage refers to the chief of the region known as Timna, etc.]

According to *Ibn Ezra* who holds that these are the actual names of the chiefs, this Timna and Oholi-

bamah are men; they are not the women of those names mentioned in verses 12 and 2. Or, they may refer respectively to Eliphaz's concubine and Esau's wife Oholibamah, mentioned above, the intent being: the chiefs of Timna, i.e., the chiefs who descended from Timna Eliphaz's concubine, were: Chief Alvah, Chief Yatheth, who were Amalekite chiefs. Similarly in the case of Oholibamah, the chiefs of her clan were those seven enumerated in verses 41-43, contemporaries with Moses.

42. אלוף תימן אלוף מבצר — The chief of Teman, the chief of Mivtzar.

43. מגדיאל — Magdiel.

According to *Rashi* following *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* and the *Midrash*, the place Magdiel [lit. raised by God] is to be identified with Rome. This is in line with the frequently expressed tradition of the Sages that Rome evolved from Esau.

Ramban differs with this identification maintaining that even if it is a prophetic prognostication of the future, this particular identification of Magdiel as Rome is unclear, since Rome was not merely a chieftaincy, but the greatest empire that ever existed! Furthermore, Rome had many emperors; why should only Magdiel be mentioned? Rather, the reference in *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* to Magdiel being Rome

אֵלֶּה | אֱלֹפִי אֲדֹם לְמִשְׁבַּתָּם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲחֻזָּתָם הוּא עָשָׂו אֲבִי אֲדֹם:

וישלח לחמג

is not meant as an identification of this particular chieftain, but as a symbolic allusion of the development of history, just as so much of the Book of Genesis depicts events in the lives of the parents that are portentous for future generations of their children. The ten latter Edomite chiefs — including Magdiel — intimate that there will be ten Edomite rulers during the Fourth Kingdom [i.e. the fourth great world power] who will in succession subjugate Israel until such time as Israel's final and complete deliverance will be effected by the Messiah. [The sovereignty of the Fourth Kingdom — Rome — still holds sway (see comm. to 28:12).]

The tenth of these rulers, Magdiel, ruled over Persia and as his name implies he will be raised above every power (מְגִדְיָאֵל=יִתְגַּדֵּל עַל כָּל אֵל, see *Daniel* 11:36) in that his influence will extend throughout the world. As the *Midrash* explains, his successor, the chief of Iram, was so called because he was destined to heap up [l'arom] treasures for the king Messiah — may he speedily reveal himself.

Gur Aryeh defends *Rashi's* identification of Magdiel as Rome against *Ramban's* objections. He notes that the Roman Empire at its zenith was certainly the world's greatest monarchy as *Ramban* claims, but it was not always to remain so, while its status as the tormentor of Israel until the coming of Messiah remains intact. Therefore, it is called a

'chieftain,' reflecting on its entire history. Furthermore, the name Magdiel was not intended to identify a single emperor; rather it is a generic term referring to all Roman rulers as 'he whom God made great.'

Others explain that the Rome was founded by the descendants of Magdiel.

אֵלֶּה אֱלֹפִי אֲדֹם לְמִשְׁבַּתָּם בְּאֶרֶץ
אֲחֻזָּתָם — *These [enumerated above] are the chiefs of Edom by their settlements in the land of their possession.*

In its concluding comment to this *Sidrah*, the *Midrash* cites the following parable:

The wheat, the straw, and the stubble engaged in a controversy. The wheat said: 'For my sake has the field been sown'; and the stubble maintained: 'For my sake was the field sown.'

Said the wheat to them: 'When the time comes, you will see.'

When harvest time came, the farmer took the stubble and burnt it, scattered the straw, and piled up the wheat into a stack, which everyone kissed.

Similarly, Israel and the nations have a controversy, each asserting: 'For our sake was the world created.' Says Israel: 'The hour will come in the Messianic future and

36 These are the chiefs of Edom by their settlements,
43 in the land of their possession.— That is Esau, father
 of Edom.

you will see how *You shall fan them, and the wind shall carry them away* (Isa. 41:16); but as for Israel — *And you shall rejoice in HASHEM you shall glory in the Holy One of Israel'* (ibid.).

הוא עשו אבי אֶדוֹם — *That is Esau, father of Edom.*

— This is Esau [who remained] in his wickedness from beginning to

end [he never repented (*Torah Temimah*)] (*Megillah 11a*).^[1]

According to the Masoretic note appearing at the end of the *Sidrah* there are 154 verses in the *Sidrah* numerically corresponding to the mnemonic קליק"יה [related to מקלט, *refuge, asylum*]. This alludes to the theme of our *Sidrah* which, as expressed by *Ramban* in his introduction to 32:4, is to teach us how to survive in Exile among Esau's descendants. The *Haftarah* begins with *Obadiah* 1:1 חיון עובדיה.

נשלם סדר וישלח

ונשלם כרך ד מספר בראשית בעזרת האל

Meir Zlotowitz

Rosh Chodesh Tammuz, 5739/July, 1979

Brooklyn, New York

1. Esau remained the mortal enemy of Jacob from the time his birthright changed hands for a bowl of lentils, and Esau earned the name Edom as a constant reminder of his greed and gluttony [25:30]. This hatred went down the generations to this very day. The closing words of our *Sidrah* proclaim to us that Edom — the kingdom that developed into Rome — remains *Esau*. No matter what its outer veneer, it still despises its brother Jacob. This is a constant in history that Esau despises his brother Jacob (cf. *Megillah 11a*).

But the response to this eternal hatred is found in the fourth verse of the *Haftarah*. The prophet *Obadiah* (1:4) predicted of Edom: *Though you make your nest as high as the eagle and set it among the stars, I will bring you down from there, says HASHEM*. They are our hope in the face of Esau/Edom/Rome's implacable hatred (R' Munk).

1911

סדר וישב

Sidrah Vayeishev

— *The Overviews*

2000

1000

An Overview —

Joseph and His Brothers*

הָיָה רְאוּי יוֹסֵף לְצֵאת מִמֶּנּוּ שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר שְׁבָטִים
כְּדֶרֶךְ שֵׁנִי מֵעֵקֶב אָבִינוּ

*Joseph was worthy that twelve tribes
should emerge from him just as they
emerged from our father Jacob.*

רְמוּתוֹ רוֹמָה לְשֵׁל אָבִיו

*[Joseph's] appearance was like his father's
(Bereishis Rabbah 84:7).*

הָיָה יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ רְאוּי לִירֹד לְמִצְרַיִם בְּשֵׁל לְשֵׁלֹאֹת
וּבְקוֹלָרִין. אָמַר הַקִּבְ"ה בְּנֵי בְּבוּרִי וְאֲנִי מוֹרִידוּ
בְּבוּרִין ... אֲלֵא הָרִינִי מוֹשֶׁךְ אֶת בְּנוֹ לְפָנָיו וְהוּא
יֹרֵד אַחֲרָיו בְּעַל כְּרָחוּ

Our father Jacob would have had to descend to Egypt in chains and a collar. Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, 'He is My firstborn son, shall I bring him down there in disgrace? ... Rather I will lead his son before him and he will be forced to descend after him' (Bereishis Rabbah 86:2).

To a child, the story is one of the most exciting and suspenseful in all of Scripture; to an adult it is one of the most perplexing and mystifying.

To a child, the story of Joseph and his brothers is one of the most exciting and suspenseful in all of Scripture; to an adult it is one of the most perplexing and mystifying. Why did Jacob favor Joseph over all his other sons? The child might accept the superficial explanation that the elderly father reserved his tenderest feeling for the youngster born in his old age — but the adult knows that “blatant favoritism” is inexcusable even on the part of ordinary parents, surely we cannot attribute such an elementary error to Jacob. Why did Joseph flaunt his dreams with their obvious implications that he would dominate his brothers? The child may wish that he too had something to hold over his brothers and sisters — but

* This Overview is based on the thesis of *Sh'loh HaKadosh* in his commentary on *Vayeishev*. Much of the material is drawn from there.

How could the brothers have been so influenced by their jealousy as to consider the murder of their own flesh and blood?

the adult expects more maturity from any seventeen-year-old, certainly from one great enough to be granted prophetic visions. How could the brothers have been so influenced by their jealousy as to consider the murder of their own flesh and blood, and finally to sell him into slavery — this is incomprehensible even to a child!

Clearly, this episode demands the insight of the Sages. And, indeed, the Sages and commentators have given us a wealth of perception and clarification; with it we can sketch outlines of the personalities and events that represent the transition between the family of the Patriarchs and the nation of Israel.

I. Joseph's Appearance

*Jacob's
Special
Love*

Joseph is considered the foremost of Jacob's offspring, so much so that the others are secondary to him.

The very beginning of the narrative stresses the overriding importance of Joseph in the development of Jacob's family ... *אֵלֶּה חִלְדוֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף*, *These are the offspring of Jacob — Joseph ... (37:2)*. Jacob had twelve sons and a daughter, but in telling the experiences of his children, the Torah mentions only Joseph. Citing the Midrash, *Rashi* writes that Joseph is considered the foremost of Jacob's offspring, so much so that the others are secondary to him. *Rashi* gives three reasons:

1) With all his being, Jacob worked for Laban *only* for the sake of marrying Rachel, Joseph's mother;

2) Joseph's features resembled Jacob's;

3) Whatever happened to Jacob, happened to Joseph: one was hated and the other was hated, one had a brother who tried to kill him and the other had brothers who tried to kill him. The Midrash cites a score of other similarities between Joseph and Jacob. The accumulation of them all demonstrates that Joseph, more than any of his brothers, was his father's heir.

Joseph was *the* offspring, *par excellence*. As such, it was natural and proper that he enjoyed the special attention of his father, just as God decreed that Isaac

be Abraham's favored son and Jacob be Isaac's.

In the next verse, (37:3) the Torah tells us why Jacob loved Joseph so much

וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אָהַב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בָּנָיו כִּי־בֶן־זָקֵנִים
הוּא לוֹ

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons since he was a child of his old age.

Here, too, *Rashi* cites three reasons:

1) The simple meaning of the verse is that Jacob felt a special affection for the son who was born to him in his old age, after nearly all the others [see commentary to that verse];

2) *Onkelos* derives the word זָקֵנִים not from the word זָקֵן in the sense of *old man*, but from the word's other connotation of a *wise man*. Jacob loved Joseph because he was the outstanding scholar among the brothers;

*Jacob loved Joseph
because he was the
outstanding
scholar among the
brothers.*

3) The word זָקֵנִים is a contraction of אִיקוֹנִים, *facial features*; because Joseph's features resembled his more closely than any of the others, Jacob loved him the most.

We *begin* the process of understanding, but these three reasons, taken superficially, still leave us far short of our goal.

*Of all the reasons
none seems
stranger than this:
Jacob loved the
son whose features
most closely
resembled his own.*

Of all the reasons given both for Joseph's primacy and for the special affection in which Jacob held him, none seems stranger than this: Jacob loved the son whose features most closely resembled his own. Can it be that among twelve sons only *one* looked like the father? And even if he did, can the judgment of a Jacob have been so warped that nothing weighed more heavily on his scales than the accident of eye color or nose length? No! Precisely because this reason as stated is so bizarre, logic forbids us to take it literally. Let us investigate this statement of our Sages, and when we understand it, we will be on the way to a comprehension of Joseph's unique position in Jacob's family.

Joseph's Face It is true — there *was* something unique about Joseph's appearance, but it was not something that could be captured in a photograph.

Joseph's face had a uniqueness that only Jacob could discern. R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik, the Brisker Rav, noted that Joseph's face had a uniqueness that only Jacob could discern. When Jacob was told, after twenty-two years of mourning, that Joseph was still alive, the Patriarch exclaimed: **אֵלֶיָּהּ וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְּטָרֵם**, *I shall go and see him before I die* (45:28).

When they finally met, Jacob said, **אָמוּתָהּ הַפַּעַם אֶחָרִי**, *at this time I am ready to die after having seen your face* (46:30). And when Jacob lay near death, he told Joseph **לֹא פָלַחְתִּי לֵאמֹר אֶרְאֶה פָּנֶיךָ**, *I dared not think I would see your face* (48:11). Three times Jacob emphasizes the need to *see* Joseph, and the Torah considers these statements important enough to quote. Clearly, there was something about Joseph's face that Jacob had to see, and having seen it he stated openly that he was content to die.

What was it about Joseph's face that meant so much to Jacob? Why could not his eleven other sons describe it to him, whatever it was? And why does Jacob imply that his life's purpose is fulfilled — that he is prepared to die — after having seen what he wanted in Joseph's 'face'?

Character, goodness, integrity, and wisdom have their own way of stamping their inner beauty on a face that never had picture-book features. Wise people know of a beauty that radiates from within. Character, goodness, integrity, and wisdom have their own way of stamping their inner beauty on a face that never had picture-book features. The Torah scholar and *tzaddik* have a beauty of a soul that pierces the limitations of its bodily host. Adam, God's Own handiwork, had that beauty when he was created; Jacob had it, too:

שׁוֹפְרִיהּ מַעֲיֵן שׁוֹפְרִיהּ רְאִים
Jacob's beauty resembled Adam's beauty
 (Bava Metzia 84a).

To a significant degree, Jacob's spiritual grandeur was even greater, because Adam's beauty was not earned; he had it by virtue of the fact of his creation by God's hand. But Jacob acquired his greatness by dint of his struggles at self-perfection. Adam's beauty was given; Jacob's was earned. In speaking of Jacob as the embodiment of the ideal human being — the sort of person because of whom God said, *Let us create man!* — the Sages teach that Jacob's image was

engraved upon God's throne of glory [see *Bereishis Rabbah* 82:2 and *Chullin* 91b).

If Adam and Jacob could stand side by side, would an onlooker say they were twin brothers? Certainly not. To speak of a human image as constantly before God is to express figuratively how high mortal man can rise; the 'resemblance to Adam' is a metaphor for the spiritual height climbed by Jacob.

The Resemblance Remains In this sense Joseph resembled Jacob. Perhaps Joseph looked like his father; perhaps he was the image of his mother. Perhaps all eleven of his brothers looked more like Jacob. All that is immaterial. But if someone could look at Joseph and say, 'He has a beauty like that of the man whose essence is engraved in God's plan of creation' — then Joseph was truly a cut above his brothers, a son worthy of his father's attention.

That sort of beauty is not visible to everyone. Only a spiritual person can appreciate spiritual beauty. And the more attuned someone is to holiness, the more he can discern nuances and varying levels in holiness, just as experts in any field can identify differences in quality where laymen recognize nothing. As we shall see below in detail, Joseph's greatness made him the spiritual heir of his father and this eminence found outward expression in a facial beauty like Jacob's and Adam's. If the brothers' perception had not been clouded by their resentment of Joseph, they could have seen it. After he revealed himself in Egypt and made peace with them, they surely recognized that he was more than just brother number eleven, and they must have reported that back to Jacob. When they said that Joseph still 'lives,' they meant a *quality* of life far above animal functioning. That is all true, but only Jacob could perceive from Joseph's face how great he was, how much of his Adam-like beauty had remained.

Jealousy? It was there, of course; the Torah tells us

their respective tribes of Judah and Levi; they are not separate tribes like Ephraim and Menasseh.

Joseph was an extension of Jacob in a more fundamental sense as well. Jacob's primary attribute is אמת, Truth.

Joseph was an extension of Jacob in a more fundamental sense as well. Jacob's primary attribute is אמת, *Truth*, or as it is also known, תפארת, *Splendor*. Both terms represent the concept of uniting all traits and talents in the proper measure so that the end product does justice to each and the whole becomes more effective — and truer — than any of its parts. For example, kindness is exemplary, but too much kindness can lead to a lack of discipline that can degenerate into self-indulgence, corruption, and debauchery. Strict justice, on the other hand, is exemplary, but carried to an extreme it can lead to harshness, callousness, and cruelty. Similarly, anger is a vice and forbearance is a virtue, but anger is a virtue when it must be directed against evil, and forbearance is a vice when it encourages the wicked. But the proper blend of kindness and strictness brings man to the ideal, it produces the 'splendor of truth.' When to shout and when to smile, when to suffer and when to enjoy, when to act and when to withdraw, finding the proper time and measure for each emotion and deed — this is the function of *Truth*, its proper exercise is *Splendor*. [These concepts are discussed at length in 'The Patriarchs,' an Overview to *Lech-Lecha*.]

Joseph's Test *The Zohar sums up Joseph's essence as בְּרִית שְׁלוֹם, the covenant of peace, for the ideal 'peace' is the proper harmonizing of all needs, interests, and desires so that all are fairly satisfied. It is illustrative that Joseph, the symbol of peace, was the center of so much controversy. If anything threatened to destroy the peace of Israel, it was the nearly fatal dispute between Joseph and his brothers and it was he who was accused of disrupting the harmony of the family. This should not surprise us. As we have seen in earlier Overviews, each Patriarch was tested with ordeals to which the proper response ran counter to his basic instinct. Abraham, the symbol of goodness, was faced with a series of challenges that called upon*

It is illustrative that Joseph, the symbol of peace, was the center of so much controversy. This should not surprise us.

so — although, as we shall see below, it was not the base, corroding, evil sort that one might infer from a casual reading of Scripture. Nevertheless, as we continue to gain a better perception of what Joseph represented, our question changes. Rather than ask why Jacob by his actions and Joseph by his words incited the jealousy and hatred of the brothers, we should ask why the brothers did not recognize that there was no more reason for them to feel ill toward Joseph than toward Jacob or Isaac. For in judging Jacob's family, we must put aside the notions which we impute to ordinary human beings. As we have seen in exploring the relationship of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah (*Overview to Vayeitzei*), one who explains their story as a triangle tottering on envy, physical attraction, and deception tells more about himself than about them. Surely we would find it incomprehensible for one of the brothers to have declared himself more worthy than *Jacob*. They knew that Jacob was not only their father, but a Patriarch of Israel, and as such was the model for them to emulate. Similarly, if Joseph was truly the 'image of Jacob', they should have followed, not rejected, his lead. Let us first explore his role in the family and then explore their antipathy toward him.

If Joseph was truly the 'image of Jacob,' they should have followed, not rejected, his lead.

II. The Transition

Extension of Jacob *Sh'loh HaKadosh* explains that Joseph represented the transitionary stage between the concept of

Though of a lesser stature than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Joseph was a 'patriarch' of the entire nation, rather than the forerunner of a single tribe.

Patriarchs and that of nationhood. Though of a lesser stature than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Joseph was a 'patriarch' of the entire nation, rather than the forerunner of a single tribe. For this reason, only he could be the father of two tribes, Ephraim and Menasseh, who were granted equal status with Reuben, Simeon and all the others (48:5). Judah and Levi, too, had outstanding sons. From one would come monarchy and from the other priesthood, but Peretz, the ancestor of the Davidic dynasty, and Kehath, the ancestor of the *Kohanim*, are parts of

him to act harshly and alienate people whom he wanted to draw closer to God. For the kind Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael into the desert or to bind Isaac on an altar was agonizing. Could he act harshly against his nature if that was God's will? Jacob, the symbol of truth, was forced into situation after situation where deception was required. Could he deal deceptively with Esau and Laban without his basic truthfulness being affected?

*Could he suffer
jealousy, hatred,
accusation,
assault, and loss of
freedom at the
hands of his
brothers, yet
remain the seeker
of peace and
harmony?*

Joseph was the symbol of peace, so he was tested in predicaments involving strife and alienation. Could he suffer jealousy, hatred, accusation, assault, and loss of freedom at the hands of his brothers, yet remain the seeker of peace and harmony? Only through such excruciating tests can greatness be established.

Joseph is described as the *tzaddik* and his attribute is *יסוד*, *Foundation*. To be truly 'righteous', one must assign each function its proper place, time, and degree. Wherever Joseph went, he won the trust of his master, whether it was Jacob, Potiphar, the head of his prison, or Pharaoh. Joseph mastered his drives and temptations as well (see below *Joseph's Test*). For this reason he was the *tzaddik* of his family and became the 'foundation' upon which Israel, and therefore the world, could be established. Therefore, Joseph represents the One Name of God, because his life revealed the harmony and balance in earthly terms that reflect the essence of God's perfection.

Coal and Flame This intimate relationship between Jacob and Joseph is expressed in *Ovadiah* (1:18):

וְהָיָה בֵּית יַעֲקֹב אֵשׁ וּבֵית יִסָּף לְהִבָּהּ וּבֵית עֵשָׂו
לְקַשׁ

The family of Jacob will be a fire and the family of Joseph will be a flame; and the family of Esau will be like straw.

*Jacob will be like a
glowing coal, but a
coal cannot
consume unless a
flame leaps from
it.*

Jacob will be like a glowing coal, but a coal cannot consume unless a flame leaps from it. The coal is fire, but it lacks the power to go further; the flame can destroy its enemies, but without the coal it cannot come into existence. Similarly, Jacob and Joseph are

one of a piece, Jacob is the source and Joseph his continuation.

The word *אש*, *fire*, has the initials of *אמת* and *שלום*, *truth* and *peace*, the attributes of Jacob and Joseph, while the word that represents Esau, *שק*, *straw*, has the initials of *קנאה* and *שנאה*, *jealousy* and *hatred*, the two traits of Esau, which are the opposites of truth and peace. For when one seeks truth there is no room for jealousy; if property, privilege or status *truly* belong to someone, honesty forbids anyone else to be jealous. Even if superior power or clever chicanery could enable an envious opponent to rob them, the usurper can be only occupier, never an owner, for they are not legitimately his. And obviously, peace and hatred are incompatible. Therefore, when Joseph was born, Jacob was ready to leave Laban's employ and, if necessary, to do battle with Esau; Jacob's truth combined with Joseph's peace were the spiritual armaments that could negate Esau's jealousy and hatred (see *Rashi* to 30:25).

Jacob's truth combined with Joseph's peace were the spiritual armaments that could negate Esau's jealousy and hatred.

It was an enduring tragedy of Jewish history that in misunderstanding Jacob's feelings toward Joseph and Joseph's feelings toward them, the brothers gave way to emotions that belonged to Esau, but that had no place in the family of Jacob: they felt hatred for Joseph (37:4) and they were jealous of him (37:11). When Israel assimilates Esau's characteristics it has been defeated, because the true arena of Israel's struggle with Esau is not the battlefield but the soul. After a spiritual defeat, physical subjugation becomes inevitable, though centuries may pass before it happens. Because the brothers felt toward Joseph as an Esau might; the result was that under the oppression of Edom — Rome, the descendants of Esau — ten of the Mishnah's great sages were chosen by Rome for barbaric execution in perverse 'punishment' for the sin of the ten brothers who were responsible for the sale of Joseph.

Because the brothers felt toward Joseph as an Esau might, ten of the Mishnah's great sages were chosen by Rome for barbaric execution.

Before going further, let us emphasize that Jacob's righteous children at their worst are not to be compared to Esau at his best; when we speak of them hating and envying we do so only in terms relative to

their righteousness, as we do regarding all the base-sounding sins that Scripture records of the spiritual giants of the past (see *Overview to Ruth*).

Inheritance The process of inheritance has spiritual connotations in addition to its utility in law as a method of allocating property. Every person has his own mission on earth as does every family and every community. So that he can fulfill his individual role, a person is granted the necessary combination of talent, health, money, property, friends, relatives, country — everything that goes along with life in organized society. As a general rule, children, despite their independent existence, share in the mission of their parents and can be expected to carry it forward when the parents leave the scene. If they share the mission, it stands to reason that they share the tools to fulfill it. So children tend to resemble their parents in looks, lifespan, and intelligence. We call it the natural process of heredity, as indeed it is, but God created the genes and their function only as the means to bring about His desired goal, not vice-versa. We inherit our parent's traits because God wants us to; the genes are there only to give effect to His will. Similarly, if fulfillment of a mission of a family requires this amount of money and that many acres of property, then the estate should rightly go to the heirs whose duty it is to continue the tasks assigned their parents, brothers, or other relatives.

We call it the natural process of heredity, as indeed it is, but God created the genes and their function only as the means to bring about His desired goal.

Isn't it possible that children have a role unrelated or different from that of their parents? Of course. So wealthy heirs can lose their fortune and the children of paupers can become wealthy. The child of wise parents may be a fool and the child of ordinary people may be a genius. What we call aberrations may be God's premeditated way of preparing for the fulfillment of His will — and leaving it to man to carry out his assigned task.

The Torah tells us that Joseph was Jacob's heir, the flame emanating from his coal.

Seen in this perspective, Joseph's similarity to Jacob takes on new significance. The Torah tells us that Joseph was Jacob's heir, the flame emanating from his coal. Of course the other eleven tribes were

Jacob's heirs as well, but Joseph was his primary heir: *These are the offspring of Jacob — Joseph ...* (37:2). Three reasons for so understanding Joseph's status are given by *Rashi*:

In his role of Jacob, he was required to elevate the world of external beauty and physical demands.

Jacob worked for Laban with his entire being [שָׂקָל עֲצָמוֹ שֶׁל יַעֲקֹב] for the sake of Rachel. As discussed at length in the Overview to *Vayeitzei*, the name 'Jacob' represents one aspect of Jacob's service, and the name 'Israel' another. In his role of Jacob, he was required to elevate the world of external beauty and physical demands, to recognize that what we call the 'real world' is a means of attaining the eternal world. In this stage of his service, Rachel was his helpmeet, and it was her whom he wanted to marry first.

Had Jacob known that the woman with him was Leah, Joseph would still have been what he was.

Many commentators note that because Joseph had been deceived into thinking he had married Rachel, Joseph was the *intended* product of his first cohabitation as a married man, and Jacob therefore regarded him as the firstborn, which he *would* have been if not for Laban's dishonesty. The comment is valid, but it goes deeper. Let us not think that Joseph's status was a product only of Jacob's ignorance. Had Jacob known that the woman with him was Leah, Joseph would *still* have been what he was, because the *Jacob*-mission could be successfully realized only by an offspring of Jacob and Rachel. *Rashi* chose his words carefully: the entire being of *Jacob*, not *Israel*, labored for Rachel, and our portion tells us that Jacob's essential offspring was Joseph.

Rashi continues that Joseph resembled Jacob, and, as we have already seen, this resemblance was of a profound spiritual nature. Akin to this is *Onkelos'* rendering in the next verse that Joseph was the greatest Torah scholar of the family.

Finally, Jacob and Joseph shared similar experiences. Of twenty-three mentioned by the Midrash, *Rashi* cites the two that are probably most indicative of their common greatness: each was hated and each was the target of murderous intentions on the part of his brother(s). *Maharal (Gur Aryeh)* explains that Jacob and Joseph were both the victims of

We can understand why someone hates an enemy, but why should someone hate a person who means him no harm?

baseless hatred. We can understand why someone hates an enemy, but why should someone hate a person who means him no harm? — It is an unpleasant part of human nature that we can sometimes dislike a person who is obviously better than we are; he makes us look bad, he makes us suffer by comparison with him, he makes our desires look petty and our excuses seem foolish. Such a person, especially if he exercises his obligation to lead, becomes a nuisance, an enemy of the people. And he is hated. Of such hatred, both Jacob and Joseph were victims because each was a superior person. This was the common denominator of their lives (*Michtav MeEliyahu*).

III. The Brothers' Hatred

A Usurper Though we may understand the brothers' antipathy for Joseph, however, how are we to understand, much less justify, their treatment of him? Esau kills whomever he hates; that is what makes him Esau — but Jacob's sons?

[As noted above, our treatment of this major question follows the thesis of *Sh'loh*. Several other views are offered in the commentary.]

His task was to initiate the roles that would eventually be taken over by other tribes.

We return again to Joseph's special role as the transition between Patriarch and People. His task was to initiate the roles that would eventually be taken over by other tribes. Aside from the *mitzvos* and spiritual greatness that are common to all Jews, there are three special positions of leadership: monarchy is the province of Judah, priestly service belongs to the *Kohanim* of Levi, and the tribe of Yis-sachar traditionally produced the largest proportion of the great scholars. In all these areas, Joseph was the forerunner of his eventual successors.

As *Onkelos* teaches, Joseph was the premier scholar of the family. Was there jealousy of that? Perhaps, but Torah is the property of all, and none of the brothers could condemn him for excelling in an area where they were free to match him. In the area

of priestly service, the future territory of Joseph would be chosen to introduce the concept that *Eretz Yisrael* would have a sanctuary as the central resting place of God's Presence. Before there was a Temple in Jerusalem, there was a permanent Tabernacle in Shiloh, in the land of Ephraim. But Joseph's offspring never replaced the *Kohanim* as the performers of the service, so that could not have been an issue between the brothers.

The crux of their dispute was the monarchy. The brothers knew that whenever a permanent kingship would be established in Israel, the dynasty would come from the tribe of Judah.

The crux of their dispute was the monarchy. The brothers knew that whenever a permanent kingship would be established in Israel, the dynasty would come from the tribe of Judah. This was not a mere accident of history; it was a requirement, and it was strictly forbidden to tamper with Judah's monarchical status. According to *Zohar*, the duty of a king to submerge his personal interests to the will of God was implicit in the name Leah gave Judah, *יהודה*, for it contains the Four-Letter Name of God [see Overview to *Ruth*].

In his commentary *Ramban* speaks movingly of the Hasmoneans, the great priestly family that led the battle against the Syrian-Greeks that resulted in the miracle of Chanukah: 'They were devout men of lofty stature, and if not for them the Torah and commandments would have been forgotten from Israel.' Nevertheless, the sons of Mattisyahu the Chashmonai died violent deaths and after several generations the entire family was assassinated without a survivor — because, *Ramban* maintains, by taking over the kingship and not returning it to the Davidic family to whom it belonged, they violated Jacob's final testament.

לא-יסור שבט מיהודה ומחקה מבין רגליו
*The scepter [of monarchy] shall not depart
 from Judah nor scholars from among his
 descendants (49:10).*

All hold that an attempt to usurp the monarchy constitutes the ultimate attempt at מורד במלוכה, rebellion against the monarchy.

Although not all commentators agree with *Ramban's* interpretation of the sin of the Hasmoneans, all hold that an attempt to usurp the monarchy constitutes the ultimate attempt at מורד במלוכה, rebellion against the monarchy, a crime for

which the king has the right to order the execution of the rebel (*Rambam, Hil. Melachim* 3:5). If it was true, as his dreams seemed to indicate, that Joseph truly wanted to become king over his brothers against their will (see *comm.* to 37:8), then he was a rebel against the monarchy of Judah and liable to the death penalty.

Let us not minimize the deliberations of the brothers. They were not engaged in a power struggle.

Let us not minimize the deliberations of the brothers. They were not engaged in a power struggle. They, too, knew that the Jewish nation was in its formative stage. They had seen how destructive to the nation Esau could have been. They had heard how destructive Ishmael could have been. It was a known fact in the Abrahamic family that the first two generations of Patriarchs produced some offspring who were unworthy of inclusion in the family of Israel. Ishmael was ready to kill Isaac. Jacob was ready to defend himself to the death, if need be, against Esau's intended attack. In the perspective of those times, it should not strike us as outlandish if the brothers had to be alert to a threat against the integrity of the family. And a traitor within — if that was what Joseph was — is more dangerous than an enemy without. Yet Jacob considered Joseph his primary heir! Shouldn't the Patriarch know what was injurious to the Patriarchal ideal? True, but hadn't Isaac thought the same of Esau? (*R' Gedalya Schorr*).

Shouldn't the Patriarch know what was injurious to the Patriarchal ideal? True, but hadn't Isaac thought the same of Esau?

The brothers knew, however, that there had to be twelve tribes; if they did away with Joseph they would be destroying the integrity of the family, whatever his real or imagined shortcomings. This problem, too, had a resolution. As far as the brothers knew, it could have meant that Jacob could have another son in place of Joseph or that one of his grandsons — perhaps Peretz, the ancestor of monarchs, or Kehath, the ancestor of priests — would be elevated to the status of tribes (see 35:11 and *comm.*). Be that as it may, what would happen to the promised number of twelve tribes was not for the brothers to decide. They had a responsibility to deal with the immediate problem in consonance with the

exigencies of the hour and in accord with the law of the Torah (*Be'er Moshe*).

They felt remorse over what they did to Joseph — but not over their judgment against him! Nowhere do we find them regretting their legal judgment.

Had Joseph truly been a usurper, they would have been right to treat him as they did. Let us note that during their ordeal before the Egyptian viceroy, they felt remorse over what they did to Joseph (42:21) — but *not over their judgment against him!* 'He begged us for pity and we ignored his pleas,' they said. Nowhere do we find them regretting their *legal* judgment against him. In fact, according to one Midrashic view cited by *Sh'lo'h*, when Joseph finally identified himself to his brothers, they converged on him to kill him then and there! God had to dispatch an angel to disperse them so that Joseph could explain himself. Throughout their travail before the viceroy, they made no effort to resist, but when they learned that he was Joseph and that he had indeed become tantamount to a king, they moved against him, because they were convinced they were carrying out the law of the Torah.

That explains how they could include even God in their ban against revealing to Jacob what they had done [see *Rashi*, 37:33]. Murderers and criminals can hardly invoke God's cooperation; they considered themselves neither.

Where They Erred Where did they err?

He even tried to insinuate himself to power by including in his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream that the king should confer absolute power upon a 'wise and understanding man.'

In kingship, too, Joseph was to prepare the way for the future; that was his mission. He became viceroy of Egypt. He even tried to insinuate himself to power by including in his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream that the king should confer absolute power upon a 'wise and understanding man,' an obvious reference to himself. Pharaoh had not asked him for advice, by what right did he go beyond the interpretation of the dreams? He *had* to — since he knew it was his duty to reign, he seized the opportunity to gain power. His assigned task was to so dominate Egypt — the nation below and its heavenly angel above — that the way would be paved for Israel's later domination of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. His dealings with the hungry Egyptian peo-

ple whom he subjugated economically and physically were in the manner of a prophecy that is reinforced by means of a tangible act, like Abraham's Covenant Between the Parts and the many prophecies in Scripture that were accompanied by symbolic acts. By rendering the Egyptians powerless and forcing them to surrender their wealth to Pharaoh, Joseph prepared the way for Egypt's later surrender to Israel.

Without doubt, kings of Israel must come from Judah, and Joseph knew that as well as his brothers. But without Joseph's ascendancy in Egypt there would have been no Exodus and no Davidic dynasty. In speaking of the Exodus, the Psalmist says *וְהָיָה יְהוּדָה לְקָדְשׁוֹ*, *Judah became His sanctuary* (Psalms 114:2). He does not single out Joseph, for the tribe of Joseph sought no dominance for itself; having performed its mission with the viceroyship of Joseph, it relinquished the scepter for eventual assumption by its rightful owner, Judah. Indeed, the leading tribe in the encampments in the Wilderness was Judah, and Judah led Israel in the conquest of *Eretz Yisrael*.

The tribe of Joseph sought no dominance for itself; having performed its mission with the viceroyship of Joseph, it relinquished the scepter.

In the future, too, it will be necessary for Joseph to lead in order to introduce the era of the Judean king.

In the future, too, it will be necessary for Joseph to lead in order to introduce the era of the Judean king. In Messianic times, the redemption will be inaugurated by a Messiah descended from Joseph. He will die and be succeeded by the Messiah from the house of David (*Succah* 52a). Then, too, Joseph will be the necessary transition to make possible the eventual reign of Judah.

The spiritual greatness of the brothers was such that they quite likely would have recognized in Joseph's desire for monarchy nothing but a sincere desire to clear the obstacles from Judah's way — if Joseph were to rule only in Egypt and in his inauguration of the Messianic era. But there would be another episode in the history of Israel.

Rehoboam, successor to King Solomon, was not in the tradition of his father and grandfather. To chastise him and help lead the family of David back to the spiritual heights of David, God designated

Jeroboam ben Nebat, a great warrior and *tzaddik*, to lead a competitive kingdom. Jeroboam, from the tribe of Joseph's son Ephraim, led a secession of ten tribes, but instead of remaining righteous and eventually reuniting with the kingdom of Jerusalem, Jeroboam was blinded by his new power and prestige. To prop up his throne and act as a counterweight to the Temple in Jerusalem, Jeroboam established idol worship in his kingdom. [See *I Kings* chap. 11-14.] Eventually, this idolatry infiltrated the kingdom of Judah. It resulted in the early dispersion and virtual disappearance of the Ten Tribes, and later, the inner corruption of Judah and the destruction of the Temple.

*Joseph was pure,
but in him was the
seed of a Jeroboam
and his successors
who would seize
kingship, hold it,
and drag the
nation down.*

Joseph was pure, but in him was the seed of a Jeroboam and his successors who would seize kingship, hold it, and drag the nation down to destruction. When the brothers heard Joseph's dreams, they perceived in the dreamer the one who would reign until he dragged his people down to ruin — and they judged him as a usurper who would destroy the nation if he were permitted to live.

The Sages teach *כל החולק על מלכות בית דוד, בחולק על השכינה*, *whoever disputes the dynasty of the House of David is like one who disputes the authority of God's Presence* (so it is cited by *Sh'loh*, but see *Sanhedrin* 110a). Because Joseph, as his brothers understood his intentions, rebelled against the authority of Judah, he was a rebel against the *Shechinah*. In judging him as they did, therefore, the brothers considered that they had the right to include God Himself, as it were, in their plot.

IV. Why the Brothers?

Predestined Event So we find a rationale for what they did, and a powerful rationale it was. They were wrong, it is true, but let us not think that the events they set in motion should not have occurred, and took place *only* because of their mistake. That Joseph was taken to Egypt and that Jacob and his family followed, *had*

to happen. The question was only how God would bring it about.

The place from which Jacob sent Joseph to visit his brothers is described in the Torah as עמק חברון, the valley of Hebron (37:14). But, Rashi asks, Hebron is in a mountain range, not a valley!

אלא מעצה צמוקה של אלו צדיק הקבור בחברון לקים מה שנאמר לאברהם בין הבתרים כי גר יהיה ורצף

[Joseph was sent] as a result of the profound [עמוקה=עמק] scheme of the tzaddik [Abraham] who is buried in Hebron, to fulfill what was said to Abraham [at the Covenant] between the Parts (15:16), 'Your offspring will be a stranger ...'

The time had come to begin the long, painful, but necessary process of sojourn and servitude that would prepare the family of Jacob for nationhood and the giving of the Torah. None of the principal actors — Jacob, Joseph, nor the brothers — knew what process was about to begin, but it was part of God's design.

None of the principal actors — Jacob, Joseph, nor the brothers — knew what process was about to begin, but it was part of God's design.

The brothers were determined to give the lie to Joseph's dreams, to shatter his ambitions of domination over them. "The dreamer," they called him contemptuously (37:19). They would sit as a court and condemn him to death as a rebel, and then: ונראה מה יהיו חלמתי, 'we shall see what will become of his dreams' (37:20). But as they confidently predicted an end to their tormentor, God was saying the same words: 'Yes, We shall see ... whose wish will be fulfilled, Mine or yours.' Their sale of Joseph to slavery in Egypt was part of God's scenario.

The hand of Heaven was at work. They thought they would kill him, and a dead man cannot reign. They made him a slave, and a slave can never be king. But God thought otherwise. Joseph would be king. Wherever he went, he ruled. As a slave of Potiphar, he was placed in charge of the household; as a disgraced prisoner, he was placed in charge of the prison; as a despised Hebrew, rushed to the

They made him a slave, and a slave can never be king. But God thought otherwise. Joseph would be king.

Finally his entire family bowed to him. Indeed, what had become of his dreams!

palace to interpret Pharaoh's dream, he was placed in charge of the entire country; and then all the surrounding countries had to come to him abjectly pleading for the privilege of buying food. And finally his entire family bowed to him. Indeed, what had become of his dreams!

There is more:

הִנֵּה יַעֲקֹב אֲבִינוֹ רָאוּי לִירֹד לְמִצְרַיִם בְּשָׁלֹשׁ לָאוֹת
וּבְקוֹלָרִין. אָמַר הַקִּבְ"ה בְּנֵי בְכוּרִי וְאֲנִי מוֹרִידוֹ
בְּבִיּוֹן ... אֶלָּא הֲרִינִי מוֹשֶׁךְ אֶת־בְּנוֹ לִפְנֵי וְהוּא
יֹרֵד אַחֲרָיו בְּעַל כְּרָחוּ

Our father Jacob would have had to descend to Egypt in chains and a collar. Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, 'He is My firstborn son, shall I bring him down there in disgrace? ... Rather I will lead his son before him and he will be forced to descend after him' (Bereishis Rabbah 86:2; cf. Shabbos 89b).

So the outcome of the scenario was predetermined. Jacob and his family *would* come to Egypt; the only question was how. God chose to mix mercy into His decree by preparing circumstances that would bring Jacob to his unavoidable Egyptian destination in comfort and honor — just as Joseph's slave-journey to Egypt was eased by a series of sales that placed him in a caravan bearing sweet-smelling spices rather than malodorous pitch and tar (see *comm.* to 37:25).

But if the fate of Joseph was inevitable, why should his righteous brothers have been the agency of his suffering?

But if the fate of Joseph was inevitable, why should his righteous brothers have been the agency of his suffering? And if God only used them to effect His will, why were they punished for what they did?

When the Lofty Fall

No one is forced to act, for good or for bad. God does not tamper with man's free will; this is a cardinal tenet of our belief, though man's intelligence is too limited to let him understand how he remains free in the face of inexorable forces that seem to propel him onto one course or another. What does often happen is that God gives opportunities for constructive action to those whose previous deeds have earned them

the privilege, and He brings opportunities for evil to those who have conditioned themselves to do wrong. As the Sages describe it:

מַגְלִילִים זְכוּת עַל יְדֵי וְכַאי וְחֻבָּה עַל יְדֵי הָבִי
They cause merit to come through deserving people and harm through bad people
(Shabbos 32a).

That a righteous person is put in a position to do good is not unearned patronage.

That a righteous person is put in a position to do good is not unearned patronage; by making himself a meritorious person he has earned the right to be the agent of further good, just as — in material terms — we do not question why the hard-working, determined businessman ‘somehow finds’ opportunities for further profitable ventures. We are conditioned to think that talented people ‘make their own breaks.’ Similarly, when harm must be done and God seeks the person who will bring it about, He tends to select someone who has made *himself* prone to wrong others. By choosing to be perverse, such people fashioned themselves into instruments of harm.

The judgment of who is righteous and who is not is far from easy. As we find constantly in the study of Scripture, the most righteous people are judged far more strictly than are others. What could easily pass as a *mitzvah* for others can be considered an unpardonable laxity for them. We know in our personal experience that we *do* maintain double standards. We expect higher standards of conduct from superior people, and well we should. The average man should be commended if he devotes ‘as much as’ a few hours a day to Torah study; the great scholar would be justly criticized if he considered ‘only’ a few hours to be sufficient.

God had no shortage of means to bring Joseph to Egypt. Midianite or Ishmaelite slave traders could have kidnapped him directly.

God had no shortage of means to bring Joseph to Egypt. Midianite or Ishmaelite slave traders could have kidnapped him directly instead of buying him from the brothers. Why should the brothers, who were trying to preserve the integrity of Israel, have been permitted to make the grievous error of so misjudging and nearly killing the one who stood only a little lower than the Patriarchs?

— Because they were so great that they were

Their negative reactions to him were trivial at the start, evidenced by nothing more than a shrug of the shoulder, an edge in the voice. But such feelings were unworthy of Jacob's children.

judged by only the strictest standards, and in such scales they were found wanting. *They hated him ... (37:4), his brothers were jealous of him ... (37:11).* Dislike and jealousy are not uncommon, not even — sometimes especially — among siblings. Undoubtedly, their negative reactions to him were trivial at the start, evidenced by nothing more than a shrug of the shoulder, an edge in the voice. But such feelings were unworthy of Jacob's children, the founders of the tribes of God. The brothers were placed in God's scale of justice and found to be wanting. For even a twinge of ill feeling toward their younger, but superior brother, men of such stature were stamped in God's eyes as people who had earned the dubious right to be placed in situations where their dislike would ripen into virulent hatred, and who would be substituted for the iron chains that would drag Jacob down to Egypt to commence the agony that had been foretold to Abraham.

The story of Joseph and his brothers is one of the most perplexing in the Torah. We have not answered all the questions it raises, but perhaps we have succeeded somewhat in showing the depth with which the deeds of our ancestors must be examined and the lessons they hold for anyone who would be worthy of being called their offspring.

An Overview —

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*

אמר [יוסף] אבא נתנסה וקניני נתנסה ואני איני
נתנסה. א"ל הקב"ה חייך שאני מנסה אתך יותר
מהם

[Joseph] said, 'My father was tested, my grandfather was tested, but I have not been tested.' The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, 'By your life I will test you more than them' (Bereishis Rabbah 87:4).

יוסף מחיב את הרשעים
Joseph obligates the wicked (Yoma 35b).

ריוקנו של אביו נראתה לו בחלון
The image of his father appeared to him in the window (Sotah 36b).

Was It a Test? Joseph was tempted over and over by his master's wife, so much so that the Sages describe the temptation as greater than any of the tests faced by Jacob or Isaac, and his triumph is held up as the example that proves even to the wicked that man can be strong. As we have seen in earlier Overviews, a נסיון, test, in God's terms is an ordeal precisely calculated to stretch a person's will to the very limits of his endurance.

Were it not for the superlatives with which the Sages and commentators describe the gravity of Joseph's test and his greatness in surmounting it, we would hardly assign such status to either.

Every human being faces some degree of temptation many times in an average week, or even day. But not every seductive chocolate, profit, or pleasure constitutes a 'test' in classic terms. Were it not for the superlatives with which the Sages and commentators describe the gravity of Joseph's test and his greatness in surmounting it, we would hardly assign such status to either. On the one hand, Joseph was asked to commit an act of immorality that would have been a sin to God and an act of ingratitude to Potiphar, his benefactor. Granted that his temptress made his life

* This Overview is based on *Be'er Moshe*.

an unremitting ordeal of threats and blandishments, it is hard to see how such a test could be called superior to those of the Patriarchs. Joseph was asked to commit a blatant, undeniable sin. He was not the first nor the last to resist such temptations. Why should his response be accounted great enough to earn him the title *יוסף הצדיק*, *Joseph the Righteous*?

Furthermore, Joseph did not persevere on his own.

*Joseph's strength
was not his own;
there was a
miraculous
intervention at his
moment of
weakness.*

Joseph's strength was not his own; there was a miraculous intervention at his moment of weakness. His father's image appeared to him by the window just as he was about to submit to the advances of Potiphar's wife. How can such an event serve as a lesson to the wicked who are not given inspirational assistance at their point of failure? (*Pri HaAretz*).

Like Tamar and Ruth

The comments of the Sages compel us to recognize that the test was of an awesome degree, and that Joseph's response was worthy of Jacob's greatest heir. Consequently, the sudden appearance of his father's image could not have been unrelated to Joseph's own stature, otherwise his ultimate refusal to sin could not be considered such a mark of personal exaltation.

*Let us understand
clearly that the
intensity of
Joseph's test was
not related to the
woman's promises
of pleasure or her
threats of death.
Lesser Jews have
withstood worse.*

Let us understand clearly that the intensity of Joseph's test was not related to the woman's promises of pleasure or her threats of death. Lesser Jews than Joseph have withstood worse. Rather, the siren call of the Egyptian woman struck a spiritual chord in him and very nearly convinced him that God wished him to live with her.

Two other women in Scripture made advances to men. The first was Tamar who deceived Judah into living with her, and conceived Peretz and Zerach, two-thirds of Israel's leading tribe, one of them the ancestor of David. The second woman was Ruth who came to Boaz secretly and asked him to marry her, a marriage that produced Oved, the grandfather of David. The Sages compare Potiphar's wife with Tamar and Ruth. She fell short of them, it is true, but not by very far.

אמר ר' יהושע בן לוי, ראיתה באצטרולוגין שלה

שְׁעִתִּידָהּ לְהַעֲמִיד בָּנִים מִמֶּנּוּ וְאִינָה יוֹדַעַת אִם
מִמֶּנָּה אִם מִבִּתָּהּ

R' Yehoshua ben Levi said: She saw through her astrology that she was destined to establish descendants from him, but she did not know whether it would be from her or from her daughter (Bereishis Rabbah 85:2).

Both she and Tamar acted as they did for the sake of Heaven.

Tamar was right, Potiphar's wife was nearly right.

Both she and Tamar acted as they did for the sake of Heaven because each was convinced that noble offspring would be the product of the respective unions. Tamar was right, Potiphar's wife was nearly right — and she was close enough to the truth to put Joseph to one of the severest of all tests (*Bereishis Rabbah 85:2*).

In comparing her with Ruth, the Sages describe her in unusually harsh terms, but it is remarkable to note the particular aspect of her behavior that they criticize:

Accursed are the wicked! Later [in the case of Ruth we find her saying]: 'Spread your robe over her handmaid' [as a symbol of marriage], but this one spoke like an animal: 'Lay with me!'

Tamar and Ruth are among the most outstandingly righteous women in Jewish history. The sincerity of Potiphar's wife is placed on a par with Tamar's: 'Just as one's intent was for the sake of Heaven, so the other's intent was for the sake of Heaven.' She is denigrated in comparison with Ruth only regarding the coarseness of her speech. It would seem that, though she erred in wanting to live with Joseph, there was justification for it, so much so that Joseph was tested and proved his greatness by not being ensnared.

Duty to Sin? As is plain from numerous passages in the Torah and Talmudic literature, the ancients knew how to foretell events through astrology. Potiphar's wife could see that she was destined to be the ancestress of Joseph's children and she coveted the privilege, just as Tamar before her had coveted the privilege of giv-

ing birth to Judah's children. Whatever she knew through her occult powers, Joseph surely knew. He was fully aware that he was Jacob's primary heir and the prophetic dreams that antagonized his brothers never left his consciousness (see *Ramban* 42:9 and *comm.* throughout the narrative). He knew his responsibility to the future of Israel, and if his master's wife was truly sincere — 'for the sake of Heaven' — in wishing to unite with him, then he had to consider that he might be duty-bound to accept her entreaties. Two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim, were destined to be born to him, Messiah ben Joseph, the forerunner of the Davidic Messiah would descend from him, the destiny of Israel depended on him and his progeny. And the ancestress of all this was to be the woman who did everything in her power to incite him. Had he the right to refuse her? (*Ramchal*).

The ancestress of all this was to be the woman who did everything in her power to incite him. Had he the right to refuse her?

According to R' Yochanan and Shmuel (*Sotah* 36b), Joseph had finally decided to go along with her wishes when he had his final encounter with her (39:11ff). [However, Rav (*ibid.*) disagrees, maintaining that he intended only to carry out the household duties assigned him by Potiphar.] It would be an injustice to Joseph to assume that he was weakened by her urgings and finally overcome by his lust. Joseph was surely able to control his desires. He had already been shown prophetic dreams, had come to 'resemble' the holiness of Jacob and Adam, had emerged as the greatest scholar among the brothers, and had been acknowledged as Jacob's paramount son. Even the greatest people can sin, but in understanding the sins of the holiest, we must attempt to find the source in miscalculation rather than uncontrollable passion. Joseph made a judgment. He knew that Potiphar's wife was an essential component of his future, and therefore he decided to join her.

The greatest people can sin, but in understanding the sins of the holiest, we must attempt to find the source in miscalculation rather than uncontrollable passion.

In this light, Joseph's earlier protestations seem more plausible. The Torah tells us that he spoke to the woman of sin, ingratitude, and betraying Potiphar's trust. The Talmud (*Sotah* 36b) states that Joseph argued God might appear to him in the even-

*How strange that
his arguments
emphasized ethics,
morality, and
piety.*

ing and he had to maintain himself in a condition of *טהרה*, *purity*, and that he had to remain worthy to have his name engraved with those of his brothers on the sacred garments of the *Kohen Gadol*. How strange that his arguments emphasized ethics, morality, and piety. If one were urged to murder and he expressed such tepid demurrals — it isn't nice, the victim was kind to me, what will the neighbors say? — instead of protesting vehemently that he would rather be killed than kill, we would regard him as failing to comprehend the enormity of murder. There was a good reason why Joseph spoke as he did. He *could not* label this act as a grotesque sin — because it might not have been a sin at all! Finally, he concluded that, indeed, the *mitzvah* of building his share of Israel required him to live with Potiphar's wife. And he came to the house to do what he was required to do.

Jacob's Image

*Then he saw
Jacob's image
before him and he
recoiled. All his
life, Joseph's goal
had been to
resemble his father
more closely.*

Then he saw Jacob's image before him and he recoiled. The image was no miracle. One of the proofs of Joseph's pre-eminence had been his spiritual resemblance to Jacob. All his life, Joseph's goal had been to resemble his father more closely to be worthy of bridging the eras of the Patriarchs and nation.

As *Chiddushei HaRim* commented on Abraham's test at the *Akeidah*, in a time of extreme crisis, a person becomes incapable of calm, reasoned analysis. His greatest strength at such a moment is the instinct he has developed through all his years of living and striving. People who have failed to develop their spiritual resources before crisis strikes them will not have the reserves to conquer it. This is true in all areas. The businessman who failed to develop his integrity in routine times will not have it when the price of honesty seems to be a lifetime of effort crashing down around him. The political leader who failed to develop a general philosophy of life, governance, and statecraft will lack instincts of consistent decision-making when all hangs on his judgment. The scholar who failed to develop his concentration

and to stoke his desire in ordinary times will fail to muster the intensity and recall needed when complex and knotty problems challenge his intellect.

Joseph had absorbed his father's attribute. Jacob was the Patriarch of אמת and תפארת, *truth* and *splendor*. As discussed above, these attributes represent a weighing and apportioning of all values and components to produce a perfect balance. Jacob was present within Joseph. At the moment when presence of mind should have deserted Joseph, he recalled the prime influence on his life — Jacob's unforgiving quest for truth. At the moment when Joseph's resistance to sin had been eroded by the persuasive insistence that he was about to do a *mitzvah*, the training of a lifetime passed before him.

*When presence of
mind should have
deserted Joseph,
he recalled the
prime influence of
his life — Jacob's
unforgiving quest
for truth.*

Truth allows no compromise. Might have beens are not good enough. Potiphar's wife had seen her stars and Joseph had seen his קדש רוח, *holy spirit* — but neither one knew that the mother of Menasseh and Ephraim had to be *this particular* woman, or that the *possibility* of performing a *mitzvah* could override all the arguments to the contrary, including the brazenness and coarseness with which she expressed her desire to act for the sake of heaven. R' Simcha Bunim of P'schis'cha taught that even one's deeds done for the sake of Heaven must be done in a manner befitting Heaven. It is all too easy to delude oneself into thinking that he may take every form of license as long as he is convinced he is doing the right thing with honorable intentions.

According to the *Zohar*, Joseph earned the appellation *Tzaddik* only by virtue of his resistance to Potiphar's wife. He was ready to sin with the woman. Day after day he had refused her and kept a tight rein over his passion, but once he had made the determination that *her* vision of their joint destiny was correct, he allowed human feelings to run unbridled. Passion unleashed is as hard to restrain as a runaway team of horses going downhill. Nevertheless, when Joseph's vision of truth reasserted itself, he regained full control over all his faculties, even the lust that normally drags man along with it until it is

*Passion unleashed
is as hard to
restrain as a
runaway team of
horses going
downhill.*

At the hardest of all moments, Joseph summoned up the vision of Jacob — and thereby became the personification of a righteousness that dominates even man's most animalistic drives.

sated. At the hardest of all moments, Joseph summoned up the vision of Jacob — and thereby became the personification of a righteousness that embraces, purifies, and dominates even man's most animalistic drives.

In a deeper sense, this vision, too, represents an overpowering passion — a passion for truth that becomes the strongest factor in a person's life, not a negative passion, but a positive one that does not compromise with the allures of the moment. As the *Maggid of Mezritch (Or Torah)* commented, Joseph's vision of an 'image of Jacob' symbolized his dedication to the particular value best represented by Jacob: *Tiferes*, the splendor of perfect harmony. She utilized every wile and device to create settings of perfect beauty to tempt and entice the young, lonely Hebrew slave. *Midrash Tanchuma* teaches that she even wore different outfits morning and evening so that beautiful physical surroundings would aid her enticing mirage of a spiritual destiny together. But at the crucial moment, Joseph would not be blinded. Instead of accepting her image of splendor, he saw the splendor of Jacob's world view, that of defining every act and desire in terms of a harmonious picture of Godly service through absolute truth and honesty.

The *Zohar to Vayechi* makes it unmistakably clear that the appearance to Joseph of Jacob's image was an indication of Joseph's own victory over himself rather than a miraculous intervention to rescue him from sin:

[As Jacob lay on his deathbed] *He called to his son Joseph (47:29) — were the other tribes not his sons? Rather, Joseph was more his son than any of the others ... Come and see what is written [of Joseph] וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲדֹנָי, but he adamantly refused. He said to his master's wife ... (39:8). The Holy One, Blessed be He, said of him, 'Of you is written the words וַיֹּאמֶר, he refused and said; by your life, the same phrase will come as [the introduction to] the blessing for your children and they will be blessed with it, as it is written [וַיִּמָּן] and he [Jacob]*

Of you is written, 'he refused and said'; by your life, the same phrase will come as [the introduction to] the blessing for your children.

refused [to give preference to Menasseh over Ephraim] ... וַיֹּאמֶר, and he said ... (48:19). [Jacob said of Joseph's refusal to comply with her wishes] at that time you proved with your own body that you are my son, when you saw my image and remained firm in your bodily covenant ... Joseph was truly *his* son, for they both had the same image; whoever saw Joseph testified that he was Jacob's son.

[Control over] the body and the covenant are identical, for our father Jacob symbolizes the concept of truth, and Joseph [who overcame passion] symbolizes the *tzaddik*.

Joseph's Legacy

The Talmud describes vividly the excruciating torment with which he forced himself away from the deed he had contemplated.

Let us not think that Joseph's last-second decision to flee from his temptress was easy. Desire, once unleashed, is not like a faucet that can be turned off easily. The Talmud (*Sotah* 36b) describes vividly the excruciating torment with which he forced himself away from the deed he had contemplated. That is why his accomplishment had significance for the entire nation.

As we have seen often in the Torah's narration of the lives of the Patriarchs, their deeds had eternal repercussions because they embodied all generations of Israel within themselves. *Ramban* writes that because Abraham went to Egypt to escape the Canaanite famine and because he exposed Sarah to danger by saying that she was his sister, his descendants would be forced to go to Egypt and live under Egyptian domination. *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that Jewish love of *Eretz Yisrael* throughout all exiles and Jewish readiness to sacrifice life and even children for the sake of God are legacies of Abraham's devotion to the Land and his binding of Isaac on the altar. The Sages teach that Abraham's hospitality to the angels (18:2-8) was reciprocated by God Who provided for Israel in the Wilderness. As the bearer of the Patriarchal tradition, Joseph's deeds, too, were not private affairs.

As the bearer of the Patriarchal tradition, Joseph's deeds, too, were not private affairs.

Indeed, R' Shimon ben Yochai (*Bereishis Rabbah* 71:2) teaches that the entire nation is regarded as if it

descended from Joseph, because it inherited the holiness of Joseph. Jewish tenacity to preserve its morality is his legacy (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32). The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 87:8) teaches that the Sea of Reeds split to permit Israel to pass through because they carried with them the coffin containing Joseph's remains:

Because Joseph [יִסְחָק] 'fled' from Potiphar's wife [39:12], הָיָה כְּאִם בָּרָאָה וַיֵּנֶס, *the sea saw* [his remains] *and fled* (*Psalms* 114:3).

Therefore, the Sages taught, Joseph's example obligates even the wicked to subdue their passions (*Yoma* 35b). He was no eunuch. Once he made his decision to come to her, his desire was as powerful as any lesser man's — no! it was *more* powerful because he thought he was performing a *mitzvah* — but he was able to subdue it because he recognized the truth as paramount. So his triumph is all the greater.

So, too, anyone who departs from sin because of the Holy One, Blessed be He, like Joseph who restrained himself from his master's wife, has sanctified God's Name.

'So, too, anyone who departs from sin or who performs a commandment not because of any consideration whatever — not dread, not fear, not to seek honor — but only because of the Holy One, Blessed be He, like Joseph who restrained himself from his master's wife, has sanctified God's Name (*Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah* 5:10).

An Overview —

Dreams — Prophetic and Pointless

דברי חלומות לא מעלין ולא מורידין
Contents of dreams have no validity
(Sanhedrin 30a)

רבה רמי, כתיב בחלום אדרבך בו וכתיב וחלומות
השוא יבררו? לא קשיא כגון על ידי מלאך כגון
על ידי שר

Rava noted a contradiction: It is written, 'I [God] speak to him [a prophet] through a dream' (Numbers 12:6) and it is written 'and the dreamers speak vanity (Zechariah 10:2)? — This is not difficult, here [the dream] is through an angel and there it is through a demon (Berachos 55b).

חלומות הולכים אחר הפה
[The realizations of] dreams follow the words [of the interpreter] (Berachos 55b).

Dreams form an essential part of Joseph's story. His long travail was set in motion by the dreams he told his brothers and he was recommended to Pharaoh because of the dreams of the two imprisoned chamberlains. Finally, he became viceroy of Egypt, fed the world, and brought his family to Egypt as a result of Pharaoh's dreams. These dreams seem to be prophetic, although the Talmud derives from Scripture that such dreams as those of the chamberlains are fulfilled only in accordance with the words of their interpreter (*Berachos 55b*).

Sometimes the Talmud derides the validity of dreams and other times it lends them credence.

Sometimes the Talmud derides the validity of dreams and other times it lends them credence. A person who has a disturbing dream may fast even on the Sabbath to annul its evil portent, and during the Priestly Blessings we recite a prayer asking God to fulfill good dreams and nullify bad ones (*Berachos 55b*). If one dreams that he has been placed under a חֶרֶם, *ban*, he must assume it to be a heavenly mes-

A portion of the
higher soul leaves
the body and
associates with
spiritual beings
that are
unencumbered by
a body.

hours. A portion of the higher soul leaves the body and associates with spiritual beings that are unencumbered by a body. It can be told things by them, sometimes by holy angels and sometimes by evil demons. If the soul transmits these messages and revelations to man's lower intelligence, they may take the form of dreams.

Thus, dreams are of various origins. Sometimes they are pure fantasies affected by a person's health, strivings, or preoccupations; such dreams have no meaning or value, except to the extent that they reveal what goes on in the individual dreamer's fantasy. If a dream reflects the message of a demon, it, too, is false. But if its origin is the teaching of a higher spiritual being, then its message is true and it is God's way of communicating knowledge of the future or insight into the present.

Since man has an active imagination, however, all dreams, even those that originate from higher sources, become intermixed with his personal images. As a result, there is no dream without some meaningless portions, and even the dreams that are essentially true will not be accurate in every detail; the parts that are realized were supplied to the higher soul by spiritual forces, while the parts that never happen were products of the dreamer's personal fantasy (*Berachos* 55a). *R' Bachya* (*Bereishis* 41:1) describes this form of revelation with the figure of speech *נְבוּאָה קְטָנָה*, *minor prophecy*; it is what the Sages describe as *חֲלוֹם אֶחָד מִשְׁשִׁים בְּנְבוּאָה*, *a dream is one sixtieth of a prophecy* (*Berachos* 57a).

Since this limited degree of revelation is diluted and obscured by the personal fantasies of the dreamer, it stands to reason that the less active his imagination, the less diluted his dream will be by external factors. This is why the Talmud (*Bava Basra* 12b) states that fools and children are more prone than others to prophecy. The Talmud does not mean that God reveals Himself to them as He did to the prophets of Scripture; such revelation could only be experienced by people who had attained a level of spiritual greatness far beyond that of even people of

The Talmud states
that fools and
children are more
prone than others
to prophecy. The
Talmud does not
mean that God
reveals Himself to
them.

sage and assemble ten people to release him (Nedarim 8a; see also *She'iltos d'Rav Achai Gaon, Miketz; Tashbetz*, part 2:128, 129).

When the Soul Rises A general outline of man's ability to assimilate heavenly messages in his dreams is given by *Derech Hashem* (3:1). Sometimes God conveys a prophecy in a dream. Such prophecies come directly from God and are not to be confused with the dreams discussed by the Talmudic passages cited here. There are forms of metaphysical communication, however, that are received in dreams.

In addition to the soul that gives man the ability to live — a soul that is more or less similar to the life-force of all animals — man has a higher soul. Its function is to provide a bridge between man's animal nature and the wholly spiritual forces above him. Naturally, this soul becomes substantially limited as long as it is connected to its human host, but certain facets of it retain the power to soar above the body, so to speak, and absorb spiritual messages that ordinarily would be beyond a person's ability to comprehend. An illustration of this is found in *Megillah* 3a, which tells of Daniel who was shown a vision. His companions did not see the vision but they became frightened nonetheless. Why did they fear something of which they were unaware? asks the Talmud. *אינהו לא חזי מלניהו חזי*, they could not see but their 'mazel' saw. This mazel, *Derech Hashem* explains, refers to a facet of their higher soul that was capable of knowing, and fearing, what its human body could not perceive.

Night time, when a person sleeps, provides freedom for the imagination from the discipline man imposes on it while he is awake and in need of all his faculties. Then people dream. They may dream of many things, most of them outgrowths of their experiences and ambitions of the day. Whatever absorbs a person's consciousness during the day — his activities or what he wishes his activities to be — will tend to form the subject matter of his dreams.

Another thing happens during those sleeping

When conveyed to people with highly active minds, such revelations will find their way into dreams where they will be overwhelmed by many other images.

high caliber, much less fools and children. Additionally, true prophecy disappeared after the Babylonian exile. What the Talmud describes as the 'prophecies accessible to fools and children' are the fragments of revelation brought by the higher soul from the angels. When conveyed to people with highly active minds, such revelations will find their way into dreams where they will be overwhelmed by so many other images that the heavenly message will be unrecognizable. But if they are incorporated into the dreams of those who bring less personal stimuli into their dreams, the bits of revelation will remain relatively undiluted. Such dreams can come to the wicked as well as the righteous, for even the wicked are endowed with a soul that can reach the very heavens; what must be done is to retrieve the substance of the dream from the chaff (see also *Tashbatz*, part 2:128).

Indeed, *Or HaChaim* stresses that an indication of a dream's validity is that it be clear and vivid (*Bereishis* 28:12, 37:7), and that its content not be an obvious outgrowth of the dreamer's daily preoccupations (41:1).

Kinds of Messages

As the soul makes its way through the spiritual spheres, it can receive a wide variety of messages from many angels and demons. When they are filtered into the sleeping psyche, they are garbed in the images that we see in dreams. For example, revelations of abundant rainfall, flowing Torah knowledge, or a damaging flood may all take the form of a dream about a well. Plentiful fruit, several generations of offspring, many branches of a family, or the healthy and rapid growth of children may all be portrayed in a dream-image of a growing vine with many full bunches of grapes.

Many different messages may be translated into a single dream-image.

Furthermore, many different messages may be translated into a single dream-image. This is why the Talmud states that the twenty-four acknowledged interpreters of dreams in Jerusalem once gave different interpretations of a single dream, *all* of which came true. There is neither magic nor contradiction

Because each interpretation was valid, however, all came true. Had the interpretations been contradictory, it would have been obvious that some were purely the imagination of the interpreter.

in this. All the messages were garbed in the same set of images, but each interpreter perceived only one aspect of the dream. Because each interpretation was valid, however, all came true. Had the interpretations been contradictory, it would have been obvious that some were purely the imagination of the interpreter. This is why the Talmud teaches that a dream will be fulfilled according to the formula pronounced by a reliable interpreter — provided his interpretation fits the content of the dream and provided it is not contradicted by other interpreters. In other words, it is not that an interpreter has the power to control a person's destiny; rather he has the ability to discern the truth that may be buried in a welter of fantasies. But if his view is not consonant with the dream itself, or if equally competent analysts dispute him, his view may be invalid (*Abarbanel; Maharsha*).

If the dreamer takes the dream seriously enough to seek an interpreter, he has given it credence and subjected himself to the power of its message.

Maharsha and *Or HaChaim* (in *Chofetz Hashem* to *Berachos* 56a) hold that sometimes even the flawed revelation of a demon can come true. This sort of dream, as noted above, is of the sort that has no validity. As *Berachos* 55a puts it, it is like an 'unread letter' whose contents are meaningless to someone who ignores them. But if the dreamer takes the dream seriously enough to seek an interpreter, he has given it credence and subjected himself to the power of its message, even though it may come from a demon. The key to this concept is that the dream in question was not the product of daytime preoccupations, but of a spiritual force that seeks to influence the dreamer.

A truly prophetic dream, such as those of Jacob in *Vayeitzei* and countless others described throughout Scripture, is fulfilled whatever would-be interpreters say of it. As the classic commentators explain, only Moses was able to perceive prophetic revelation while in control of all his human faculties. Because Godly revelation is too much for the human body to endure, no other prophet could accept God's word while in full control of his body. Depending on the spiritual perfection of the individual prophet, one might only fall into a trance, while another could

accept revelation only in a dream. But such dreams are as much prophecies as the Face-to-face revelations given Moses, and they *must* come true.

The Dreams of Bereishis

Joseph's dreams were prophetic and would have come true whether or not they were interpreted.

In the light of the above, we can better understand the dreams of our narrative. Joseph's dreams were prophetic and would have come true whether or not they were interpreted. The Sages differ only on one point: Were the dreams prophetic in their entirety or were they, too, invaded by an element of external fantasy? As the Commentary notes, the problem arises regarding the 'moon' that he dreamt would bow to him. The moon was obviously symbolic of his mother, Rachel, who was not living. According to one view of the Sages, that part of his dream had no significance, according to the other view it referred to Bilhah who raised him after Rachel's death.

The dreams of the two chamberlains are cited by the Talmud as examples of the sort whose fulfillment depends on the word of the interpreter. There were many implications in those dreams in addition to ones quoted by Scripture, that the cupbearer would live and the baker die. According to *Chullin* 92a, there were references to Jewish history, and, quite likely, there were others as well. Had Joseph interpreted some of the symbolisms in a manner that did not contradict the symbolism of the dream or God's will, his interpretation would have been fulfilled.

Pharaoh's dream cannot be regarded as a prophecy in the sense of a personal revelation from God, for he was surely not worthy of prophecy. Nevertheless, as Joseph made clear to Pharaoh, the dream was given him to forewarn him of future events. Theoretically, it, too, could have been open to more than one correct interpretation, like the one interpreted by the twenty-four wise men of Jerusalem. Had the speculations of Pharaoh's wizards been faithful to the context of the dream and had they been competent to interpret dreams, their interpretations might have been just as valid as Joseph's but Pharaoh would not accept their versions for the reasons given in the Com-

Had the speculations of Pharaoh's wizards been faithful to the context of the dream, their interpretations might have been valid.

mentary. In addition to those reasons, however, part of the Divine plan was, as *R' Bachya* writes:

*God wished to
make Pharaoh
dream and to
perplex his spirit
through a dream in
order to promote
Joseph.*

God wished to make Pharaoh dream and to perplex his spirit through a dream, and to make the advice of his necromancers and wise men seem foolish in order to promote Joseph to that eminence.

..
[The above is but a brief outline of the Talmudic sources and the views of the commentators on the subject of dreams. It includes only information deemed helpful in providing a perspective on our chapters of *Bereishis*. For a fuller understanding, the reader should consult the sources cited in this presentation.]

An Overview — And He Was a Youth*

„והוא נער“ שהיה עושה מעשה נערות. מתקן בשער ממשמש בעיניו כדי שיהיה נראה יפה
'And he [Joseph] was a youth': he acted like an adolescent, dressing his hair, and adorning his eyes to look handsome (Rashi from Bereishis Rabbah 84:7).

ג' מדות היו בו, בן תורה ונביא ואת אהיו הוא מכלכל ... ומנין שהוא נביא שנאמר והוא נער ... ובתיב ומשרתו יהושע בן נון נער ... ובתיב ויגדל הנער שמואל

[Joseph] had three attributes: he was a Torah scholar, a prophet, and he supported his brothers ... How do we know he was a prophet? For it says (37:2), 'He was a youth ... and it says (Exodus 33:11), 'and [Moses] servant Joshua ben Nun was a youth ... and it says (I Samuel 2:21), 'and the youth Samuel grew up (Tanchuma Yashan).

Contradictory Interpretations The seventeen-year old Joseph was described as נער, a youth (37:2), to which Rashi quotes the Midrashic interpretation cited above. Without doubt, the words must be taken literally: surely Joseph *did* those things and none of the commentators to the Midrash or Rashi suggests otherwise. But the unadorned words of Rashi do violence to our comprehension of a Joseph's greatness — even at the age of seventeen. We expect more from a mature seventeen year old today, what are we to say of one who was already established as Jacob's primary son and heir, who was already receiving prophetic dreams, who had acquired enough wisdom and maturity to survive a twenty-two year exile in the ordeals of slavery and monarchy! In the words of

The unadorned words of Rashi do violence to our comprehension of a Joseph's greatness — even at the age of seventeen.

* This Overview is based on *Michtav MeEliyahu*.

Chiddushei HaRim, 'Who is fool enough to believe that these words are to be taken only at face value?'

Of course, Joseph did all those things, and that is one of the reasons his brothers lost their regard for him. The question is, why did he do it?

Of course, Joseph did all those things, and that is one of the reasons his brothers lost their regard for him. The question is, why did he do it? Certainly Joseph should have known that such preening could gain him nothing and cost him much.

Among the writings of the Sages and commentators, we find six interpretations of the phrase 'he was a youth'; two understanding it in its demeaning literal sense and the other four in a diametrically opposed manner:

1) *Rashi's* interpretation that he constantly preened himself.

2) He was too immature to foresee the consequences of such behavior (*Gur Aryeh*).

3) According to the Kabbalah, both Jacob and Joseph were considered like *cherubim*, *קרובים*, atop the Holy Ark. Each of them was called *נער*: Joseph as we find here and Jacob as we find *נער בישראל*, *נער ישראל*, for *Israel* [i.e., Jacob] is a youth and I [God] love him (*Hoshea* 11:1) ... In the literal sense, the opening phrase of the verse teaches that Joseph was the primary son of Jacob, meaning, as our Sages say, that he combined within himself all the attributes of his brothers (*R' Bachya*).

He had three attributes: he was a Torah scholar, a prophet, and he supported his brothers.

4) He had three attributes: he was a Torah scholar, a prophet, and he supported his brothers. The word *נער*, *youth*, indicates he was a prophet as quoted above (*Tanchuma Yashan*).

5) His brothers demeaned the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, but Joseph served them like a slave (*Yelamdeinu*).

6) He was a *נער*, *youth*, in the sense that the great angel, *Matatron*, is called a *נער*, literally *youth*. Just as *Matatron* is described by the Sages as a means by which God reveals His goodness on earth, so Joseph brought about revelation of God's majesty on earth. Additionally, Joseph was the fulfillment of the Jacob-mission (as opposed to the Israel-mission) of his father [as described at length in the first *Over-view*] (*Sh'loh; Megaleh Amukos*).

While Joseph acted like a child, he was too great to be so small; therefore, we must find the key to his personality that lends validity to all the interpretations.

It is axiomatic in studying the sacred writings of the Sages and commentators that such differing perceptions of people or subjects do not represent conflicting opinions. Rather they express different facets and levels of the same whole. The sun may be described as yellow, bright, hot, a star, the center of the solar system, huge beyond comprehension, an insignificant part of our galaxy, a gravitational force, and so on and so on. Each description is true and all taken together give a rounded impression, but for someone completely unfamiliar with the sun, they seem like a contradictory jumble. Similarly, while Joseph acted like a child, he was too great to be so small; therefore, we must find the key to his personality that lends validity to all the interpretations.

Correct, but Ill-timed On the one hand, Joseph knew that he was foremost among the brothers and that the task of insuring the first step in Israel's development was up to him. His dreams added a dimension to his role: he would reign over his brothers and they would gather around him to bow. He understood his dreams to be tantamount to a command that he must act like a king. Furthermore, as Jacob's primary heir, he bore even a greater responsibility for the conduct of the family.

A leader cannot lead unless the people respect him, and people expect their leader to look the part. So Joseph preened himself like a king.

The honor of the nation requires its king to be well-groomed at all times. *Rambam* rules: The king must cut his hair every day, groom himself, and dress well in beautiful, glorious clothes (*Hilchos Melachim* 2:5). A leader cannot lead unless the people respect him, and people expect their leader to look the part. In modern times, the majesty of many an important office has suffered because its occupant has chosen to dress and act like a follower rather than a leader. So Joseph, who was destined to be a king, preened himself like a king.

That this was his motive is indicated by *Rashi* to 39:6. There, after Joseph became a slave in Egypt, the verse tells us that he was physically attractive. *Rashi* comments that [בִּינָן שָׂרָאָה עֲצָמוּ מוֹשֶׁל], once he saw himself as a ruler, having been appointed overseer of Potiphar's household, he began grooming

and preening himself as he had back in *Eretz Yisrael*. Thus, God punished him for his impertinence, but his motive emerges with a clarity we had not had earlier: he considered himself a ruler and felt he should act the part.

Similarly, because his personal status was midway between his father and his brothers, Joseph took upon himself the responsibility to oversee his brothers. When he thought they had sinned he went straight to Jacob, and when he felt that Bilhah and Zilpah's sons were slighted, he befriended them. The results of his deeds, as chapter 37 makes clear, were disastrous — at least until the outlines of God's master plan emerged.

What was Joseph's mistake? Despite his greatness and sincere motives, he should have realized his place.

What was Joseph's mistake? Despite his greatness and sincere motives, he should have realized his place and given consideration to whether his actions were ill-timed, even if they had logic on their side. A future king he might be, but in Canaan he was still only seventeen, and the eleventh of twelve sons. In Potiphar's house he was only a slave and he should have considered the grief his father still felt at his loss. As *Gur Aryeh* says of Joseph's behavior, he failed to foresee the consequences of his behavior.

But why didn't he? Surely a Joseph could be expected to recognize the need for elementary tact! Surely he must have known the effect he was having on his brothers, and understood that it was unwise to antagonize them further! At the very least, if he was erring innocently, should not God have protected him in the manner of the famous Talmudic exclamation, 'If God saves even the animals of the righteous from mishaps, surely he saves the righteous themselves!'

But God did not want Joseph protected. The Divine plan called for him to lose his brothers' love.

But God did not want Joseph protected. The Divine plan called for him to lose his brothers' love, become a slave and then a king, and become the instrument to bring his family to Egypt. So God allowed his judgment to be clouded, and he acted untactfully. Knowing that he was destined to be a king, he decided to *act* like a king. So Joseph groomed himself like a king, ignoring the fact that to do so

was ludicrous for a seventeen-year old who was the eleventh son in his family (*Michtav MeEliyahu*).

Chiddushei HaRim, as explained by *S'fas Emes*, gives a different interpretation of the Scriptural use of נָעַר, *youth*, to describe Joseph. Righteousness has no absolute definition. The service of a *tzaddik* must grow and change as he becomes older and wiser. No one may remain static; he must always advance and build new structures of service on his previous accomplishments. In his youth, for example, he is expected to perfect his character and behavior; as he gradually grows older, his spiritual development becomes more compassionate and seeks to help others.

In Joseph's youth, when he was engaged in perfecting the external characteristics of his spiritual nature, he was intolerant of what he perceived as his brothers' shortcomings. In his later years, when he became *Joseph the Tzaddik*, he looked differently at his brothers. Then he calmed them, forgave them and promised to provide for them and their families as long as breath was in him. Compared to the greatness expected of him as he grew and developed into one of the foremost *tzaddikim* in history, his great achievements at the age of seventeen were like a *youth* compared to a mature adult.

סדר וישב

Sidrah Vayeishev

1. The chronicles of Jacob and his offspring.

The Torah dealt with the story of Esau only very briefly. [Although it was given an entire chapter, none but the barest facts of genealogical names and places were cited.] The Torah deemed Esau's line too insignificant for a detailed recording of their settlements, wars, victories over the Horites, etc. [see *Deut.* 2:12], and so on; it limited itself to mere glosses.

Now that we come to Jacob, the Torah proceeds to relate at length and in great detail his full history and that of his progeny because God regards them as prominent and deserving of such detailed attention.

Similarly, the ten generations from Adam to Noah [5:1ff], and again those from Noah to Abraham [11:10ff], are reported in a summary manner merely listing their respective genealogies. However, when the Torah reaches Noah and Abraham, it relates their experiences in detail.

This may be compared to the case of a pearl which fell into the sand. One searches and sifts the sand in a sieve until he finds the pearl. After finding it, he discards the pebbles and retains only the pearl (*Rashi* drawing from *Tanchuma*).

וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִגְרִי אָבִיו — [And] Jacob settled in the land where his father had sojourned.

Esau had gone to a different land to be away from his brother [as mentioned in 36:6], but Jacob, in contrast, remained in the land of his father because he had the rights of the firstborn (*Rashbam*).

Though, as the previous chapter concludes, the chiefs of Esau dwelt

as masters in the land of their possessions [36:43] — i.e. the land that was their eternal possession — Jacob, like his father, dwelt as an alien in Canaan, the land of his heritage. God's prophecy that Abraham's progeny would be aliens [15:13], and consequently the concomitant promise of the ultimate ownership of the land, was fulfilled only through Jacob and his progeny, but not through Esau (*Ramban*).

[This interpretation however does not account for the use of וַיֵּשֶׁב, settled, instead of וַיֵּגֵר, sojourned, a word that is much more reflective of alien status, as discussed below. Hence the comments that follow.]

Our passage is perceived in the *Midrash* to connote how Jacob, after his life-long struggles wished finally לִישֵׁב בְּשָׁלוֹחַ, to settle down in tranquility, but the anguish of the Joseph affair sprang upon him. For when the righteous look forward to tranquility, the Holy One, Blessed be He* says, 'Are the righteous not satisfied with what is stored up for them in the World to Come that they expect to live at ease in This World too!' (*Rashi*).⁽¹⁾

*In the *Midrash* the reading is: 'The Satan says.' The latter reading follows the majority of parallel *Midrashim* which comment similarly that wherever one finds settling and tranquility, there the Satan accuses. Cf. *Sanhedrin* 106a: 'וַיֵּשֶׁב, settled, always foreshadows grief.' (Cf. *Torah Temimah*). In *Tanchuma Yashan* and *R' Bachya* however, the reading is as *Rashi* cites it.] Cf. *Torah Sheleimah* notes 1, 6 and 9.]

1. Certain old texts of *Rashi* add the following parable from the *Midrash*:

The camels of a flax dealer once came into a city laden with flax (this follows the reading in *Tanchuma*; *Rabbah* reads: thorns). A blacksmith asked in wonder where all that flax could possibly be stored.

[The commentators explain that the Midrashic interpretation is inspired by the fact that the verb יָשַׁב, *settle*, generally denotes a permanent, tranquil state of dwelling, whereas גָּר, *sojourn*, denotes the insecure גֵּר, *alien-status*, experienced by Abraham and Isaac. Abraham had been told in 15:13 that his offspring would be aliens. Rashi there explains that they would experience this alien status even while living in Canaan. Abraham is accordingly described as having only גָּר, *sojourned* [20:1 and 21:34]; Isaac was similarly commanded to *sojourn* (גָּר) in the land [26:3]. But as this verse intimates, Jacob wished to יָשַׁב, *settle down*, permanently and tranquilly in the land where his father had experienced only temporary *sojourn* (מְגוּרִי). The opening verse of this portion is intended to emphasize this contrast. But as the narrative proceeds to tell us, the affair of Joseph shattered this tranquility. Apparently God did not wish Jacob to enjoy tranquility in This World; his tranquility would be enjoyed in the World to Come.]

[The Divine Plan decreed that Abraham's offspring could not live in Canaan on a permanent footing until the fulfillment of the prophecy that they would be enslaved 400 years ... and that the fourth generation would return (see 15:13ff). Therefore, the affair with Joseph occurred which, as Rashi explains below, was the catalyst leading to the family's migration to Egypt and, eventually, Israel's enslavement.]

'Don't worry,' one clever man answered. 'One spark from your smithy, and all of it will go up in flames!'

Similarly, when Jacob heard of the multitude of Esau's chieftains enumerated above, he was struck with fear: 'Who could ever hope to conquer them?' he asked.

[God reassured him: 'You fear them? One spark from Joseph, and they will go up in flames!' *Midrash*.]

Thus, the list of Edomite rulers is followed by: *These are the offspring of Jacob — Joseph. And it is written (Obadiah 1:18): The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble; they shall burn them and consume them.*

As Rashi says above (30:25), with the birth of Joseph, Jacob felt confident enough to leave Laban and return to Canaan without fear of Esau.

As R' David Feinstein explains, Jacob's desire לִישָׁב, *to settle down* was premature, since the decree of גֵּר, *temporary sojourning*, was still in force. Therefore, as soon as Jacob sought a permanent status, the events leading to his Egyptian exile were set in motion.

בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — *In the land of Canaan.*

Since 35:27 has already related that Jacob arrived safely at the home of Isaac, this is added to emphasize how, although Esau went on to inherit Mount Seir, Jacob remained behind in *Canaan*. Though the land had been promised him as an eternal heritage — and he was now in effect but an alien — he accepted his status in complete faith. This was the case until, as the narrative continues, events led to the Egyptian bondage and their eventual conquest of Eretz Yisrael (*Or HaChaim*).

[The implication of *Or HaChaim* seems to put Jacob in the position of a conscious exile while yet in Canaan. This differs somewhat from the implication of Rashi above that Jacob attempted to alter his status to that of an indigenous inhabitant. *Or HaChaim* may be interpreted as observing how in effect — notwithstanding Jacob's desires or plans — he was but an alien on alien soil in contrast with Esau who was already master of his territory.]

This detail also serves to inform us why Jacob did not follow his past custom of courteously submitting to Esau by moving elsewhere and allowing Esau to remain in 'the land where his

וישב לזב ב פנען: אלה | תלדות יעקב יוסף בן-שבע-

father had sojourned.' Jacob insisted on remaining there because it was Canaan, and inherent in his remaining there was the *mitzvah* of *שוב הארץ*, settling Eretz Yisrael. Furthermore, Canaan is more suited to the development of holiness than any other land (*Haamek Davar*).

2. Joseph and his relations with his brothers. The seeds of the Egyptian bondage.

אלה תלדות יעקב-יוסף — *These are the chronicles of Jacob—Joseph, etc.*

[The primary meaning of תולדות, as Rashi interprets it throughout Scripture, is *genealogy; generations; offspring; progeny; products* (cf. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9). Since Joseph is the only one enumerated from among Jacob's many children, it is impossible in this context to interpret it as a listing of Jacob's offspring. Had this verse been genealogical, it should have read, as the *Midrash* notes: *These are the progeny of Jacob: Reuben, Simon, Levi, etc.*]

Therefore, pursuing what he feels to be 'the most literal meaning of the text within the context of the narrative,' Rashi explains that our passage implies אלה של תולדות יעקב

these are the chronicles pertaining to the offspring of Jacob. [I.e., having recorded Jacob's settlement in Canaan, the Torah proceeds to relate]: This is the story of the settlements and wanderings of Jacob's sons until they were permanently settled in the Holy Land by Joshua. The primary factor in this odyssey was the narrative beginning: *Joseph was seventeen years old* etc. This incident resulted in the descent to Egypt [and the foretold bondage, setting the stage for the return and permanent settlement of Eretz Yisrael.]

[Thus, Rashi regards our verse as the introduction to the entire remainder of the Torah. As he explains above, upon completion of the brief outline of Esau's progeny and their settlements, the Torah goes on to trace Jacob's wanderings and the history of his progeny until they were permanently settled in Canaan, an event which, as foretold to Abraham at the Covenant Between the Parts [see 15:13], could occur only after they were enslaved. That the Torah attaches this entire narrative to Joseph is because he is the primary protagonist of this initial part of the family's history (cf. *Mizrachi; Tzeidah laDerech; Gur Aryeh; Levush*).]⁽¹⁾

Our translation: *these are the*

1. In the *Midrash* sense, Rashi continues that our passage, *These are the progeny of Jacob—Joseph*, [instead of *Reuben* who was the firstborn] implies that Joseph was Jacob's primary son and all of Jacob's other sons were secondary to him. This was because:

(a) Jacob served Laban for no other reason than to marry Rachel [Joseph's mother, and so it may be said that Joseph, Rachel's oldest son, was the primary son while the others — though they preceded him — were born only in consequence of Jacob's desired marriage to Rachel. As we clearly see in 30:25 it was only after Joseph was born that Jacob desired to return home. Who brought them down to Egypt? — Joseph. Who sustained them in Egypt? — Joseph. It was for Joseph's sake alone that the Red Sea parted [see *Psalms* 78:17 (*Midrash*)];

(b) Joseph's facial features bore a 'striking resemblance to Jacob's [see below v. 3 on כך דקים; also see *Overview*];

(c) The destinies of both were similar: both were hated; both had brothers who wished to kill them; [the *Midrash* adds: both were born circumcised; both were born of mothers who were barren by nature; both were shepherds ... both left the Holy Land; both married and begot children outside the Holy Land; both attained greatness through dreams; both brought blessings to the homes of their fathers-in-law ... both died in Egypt and were embalmed; the bones of both were carried back to Eretz Yisrael for burial.]

chronicles of Jacob is but an attempt to capture *Rashi's* sense as succinctly as possible. *Rashi's* interpretation as understood by *Mizrachi* — in context with the previous verse — is: וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, *Jacob's [own] settlement was in Canaan*, while אֵלֶּה, *these are [the settlements of] תּוֹלְדוֹת יַעֲקֹב, the progeny of Jacob*, i.e. the events that occurred to them until the Israelites achieved permanency in Eretz Yisrael.

Apparently, most of the early commentators [such as *Ramban* below] understood *Rashi* to imply that the word תּוֹלְדוֹת itself refers to settlements. This is erroneous, as *Mizrachi* points out. Rather *Rashi* finds settlements implicit in אֵלֶּה, *these*, a pronoun which has as its antecedent the settlements of Jacob which is mentioned in the previous verse. Thus, the flow of the verse is: having just spoken of Jacob's settlement, we now go on to speak of those [i.e., the settlements] of his offspring.

Ibn Ezra — consistent with his interpretation of the word תּוֹלְדוֹת throughout Scripture — renders: *these are the histories of Jacob*: the events which befell him and the occurrences which befell him. The sense of the word תּוֹלְדוֹת is: *that which time יָלַד, brings forth* [Prov. 27:1], i.e. the events which evolved in his lifetime.

Rashbam disagrees with the above interpretations and delivers a lengthy dissertation on the principle that the interpretation of Torah must always be approached on more than one level.

Similarly, in accordance with our verse which counts Joseph as the most prominent son, the Sages note that the firstborn should have issued from Rachel, but Leah earned the privilege through her supplications [or: through God's mercy]. Yet, in reward for Rachel's modesty [in disclosing the secret sign to Leah on her wedding night (see on 29:21)] God restored the privilege to her [by conferring the status of tribes on Menashe and Ephraim, thus, in effect, giving Joseph the double portion of the firstborn (see 48:5; 35:22 ff; cf. also 49:3ff; I *Chronicles* 5:1)] (*Bava Basra* 123a).

Actually all of Jacob's children should be enumerated here. That the verse reads: *These are Jacob's progeny*: Joseph, intimates that Joseph personified the qualities of all the tribes.

Similarly, did the Sages expound: The qualities of the tribes were represented in Joseph:

The firstborn status of Reuben [which was transferred to him (I *Chron.* 5:3)];

The prophetic powers of Levi [as an interpreter of dreams (41:13)];

The sovereignty of Judah [as a ruler of Egypt (42:6)];

The wisdom of Issachar [ibid. v. 40] (*R' Bachya*).

There is a responsibility to interpret a verse in its plain, literal sense whenever possible. Simultaneously, however, one must not forget that the *essence* of Torah learning — its laws and precepts — must be elicited by the various hermeneutic rules from allusions in the text. He writes that 'the early ones, because of their piety, involved themselves in leaning toward the primary task of Talmudic interpretation which, as the Sages taught, is the most laudable pursuit. Therefore they did not accustom themselves to pursue the depth of the *literal* interpretation of Scripture.' Nevertheless he maintains that not to be overlooked is the Rabbinic dictum [Yev. 11b]: אֵין הַמִּקְרָא יוֹצֵא מִירֵי פְשׁוּטוֹ, *a Scriptural text [though it is subject to Midrashic interpretation] is never deprived of its 'literal' meaning*. *Rashbam* states that *Rashi*, his grandfather, had conceded to him that if he had had the time he would have composed another commentary incorporating the literal interpretations that were constantly being discovered.

Going to the exposition of our verse, *Rashbam* continues that in the literal sense תּוֹלְדוֹת never means *events* [as *Ibn Ezra* interprets], but *offspring* or *descendants*. In the case of Esau, his children born in Canaan are listed in 36:1. The תּוֹלְדוֹת listed in 36:9 refer to Esau's children in the *broad* sense — the generations (kings, chiefs, etc.) which *eventually* descended from him in Seir [up to the time the Torah was

עֲשֶׂרָה שָׁנָה הָיָה רָעָה אֶת־אֶחָיו בְּצֹאן וְהָיָה זֶעַר אֶת־בְּנֵי בְלָהָה וְאֶת־בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה

וישב
לזב

given (*Ramban*). In the case of Jacob, too, the Torah first named the children born to him in Paddan Aram in 35:22. Now the Torah similarly proceeds to enumerate his תולדות in the broader sense — his line of descendants (children and grandchildren) who numbered seventy when they descended to Egypt. Accordingly, the Torah begins with Joseph to relate how it came about that they descended to Egypt.

Ramban disagrees with *Rashi's* interpretation because, he maintains, settlements is simply not a proper translation of תולדות. He also disputes *Ibn Ezra's* interpretation of events, because it is idiomatically incorrect to speak of a man as (יָלַד) begetting, events; in the Hebrew, the begetting of events can be ascribed only to days, as the verse in *Proverbs* intimates. *Ramban* conjectures that according to *Ibn Ezra* the verse may mean: these are the events which [the 'days' of] Jacob begot. [*Sforno* interprets similarly. Accordingly, the word days would be unstated but clearly implied].

Ramban suggests that the passage is elliptic and means: 'These are the offspring of Jacob: Joseph and his brothers,' but 'and his brothers' is omitted since they were mentioned earlier [35:23-26. Joseph however, is mentioned because he is the main subject of the narrative that immediately follows.] Alternatively, *Ramban* offers an interpretation similar to *Rashbam's*, that אָלָה, these are, refers to all those mentioned in the rest of this Book: the seventy souls who went down to Egypt, and the תולדות, offspring of Jacob beginning with Joseph who was the prime mover of the events that led to their descent to Egypt.

When Jacob left his father's home to live with Laban, the events that occurred to him foreshadowed the history of his descendants at the first exile. After his return home, his experiences symbolized their history during the Se-

cond Temple, its destruction, the long exile, and the ultimate redemption (*Sforno*).

Joseph, at the age of seventeen.

From this chronological detail we can calculate that Jacob was 108 at the time, since he was ninety-one when Joseph was born. Isaac — who as noted in the *comm.* to 35:29 was still to live twelve years beyond Joseph's sale, and who was sixty at the time of Jacob's birth — was then 168 years old. This incident occurred nine years after Jacob was reunited with his father. Following the traditional dating, Leah died at about this time (see *Seder Olam* 2).

We also deduce from this that Joseph was absent from his father for a total of twenty-two years. He was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh [41:46], following which came seven prosperous years and two years at which time his father came to Egypt. Deduct Joseph's age at the sale (17) from his age when he was reunited with his father (39), and we arrive at twenty-two (*Rashbam*; see 'Chronological Deductions' on p. 1173).

[He] was a shepherd with his brothers by the sheep.

— i.e., he was a shepherd, and as such, was with his brothers by the sheep. Thus, only at work was he together with his brothers, the sons of Leah (*R' Hirsch*).

Only the sons of Leah, who like Rachel was a primary wife, are described as Joseph's brothers, in contrast with the sons of the ser-

37 was a shepherd with his brothers by the sheep, but he
2 was a youth with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of

vants [Bilhah and Zilpah] (Rashbam).

The translation of *עם אחיו* as *with his brothers* [cf. *עמו=אחיו*] follows Onkelos and most commentators.

The translation *he was a shepherd ... by the sheep* attempts to account for the preposition *ב* preceding *צאן*, *sheep*, rather than the more common form *רעה את הצאן*, *tended the sheep*. In the latter form, *sheep* is the object of the verb *tended*, *רעה*; if so, the flow would have been: *he tended the sheep with his brothers*. Most commentators, based on the preposition *ב*, maintain that *רעה* is a noun meaning *shepherd*, and the flow is *he was a shepherd along with his brothers*, therefore he would tend to be found *בצאן*, 'by' the sheep.

Others perceive the connotation to be that he was too young to shepherd the sheep himself, but *היה רעה את אחיו*, *he shepherded* [את=the accusative] *his brothers* *בצאן* by the sheep. That is, he assisted his brothers as they tended the sheep (Chizkuni; Alshich; similarly Abarbanel).

והוא נער את-בני בלהה ואת-בני זלפה
— But he was a youth with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah.

— I.e. but [in contrast with his work time when he associated with Leah's sons], his youthful recreation time — his youth — was spent associating with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. He kept aloof socially from Leah's sons and this caused them to hate him (Rashbam).

Joseph associated with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah because Leah's children always slighted them [as being sons of the maidservants]; he therefore made it a point to befriend them (Rashi).

These sons of the maidservants are called here not his 'brothers', but the sons of his father's wives. So the picture presented to us is of a motherless and brotherless youth. All the others grew

up in company with brothers and under the wing and influence of mother-love. Joseph stood alone. He had lost his mother early in life, and Benjamin was still too young to be a companion for him. With his step-brothers [from Leah] he did not feel comfortable; he felt more drawn towards the sons of the maidservants (R'Hirsch).

Joseph is called *נער*, a youth [even though at seventeen one is considered a man] to imply that he acted like an adolescent — dressing his hair and adorning his eyes to look handsome (Rashi from Midrash; see Overview).

Ramban maintains that although Joseph was seventeen years old at the time, he was called *נער*, youth, in the relative sense, for he was the youngest and frailest of the brothers [with the exception of Benjamin who was still a child], and therefore he sought the company of the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. It was their sons, not those of Leah, whom Jacob charged with the responsibility of raising Joseph [and presumably Benjamin too] after the death of Rachel. This interpretation is confirmed by the authoritative translation of Onkelos who renders the sense of our passage as: *והוא מרבי*, and he grew up, with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah. The Torah thus informs us that since he was a youth he stayed in their company.

According to Ibn Ezra the term indicates that the sons of the maidservants made him serve them because he was young [thus rendering: and he was a 'boy' of the sons of Bilhah, etc. A servant is therefore called *נער*, 'boy,' since a young person is generally servile to an older one (Yohel Or).] Had Joseph served his brothers from Leah — the matron — it would not have been wrong. This [degrading treatment from the sons of the maidservants] was the

subject of the evil report Joseph later brought to his father.

Sforno suggests that the Torah mentions Joseph's youthfulness to illustrate that it was precisely *because he was young* and did not foresee the consequences that he sinned by telling tales about his brothers. Though Joseph was brilliant, the Sages observed that in general בְּרִדְרָקֵי עֶצָה, *there is no wise counsel in children* [Shabbos 89b].

נְשֵׁי אָבִיו — His father's wives.

They were indeed Jacob's full-fledged *wives* [not concubines]. He married them as such [see on 30:4]. The Torah refers to them as *maidservants* only when they are mentioned together with Rachel and Leah to whom Bilhah and Zilpah were originally presented as servants. Likewise, in 35:22 when we are told that Reuben slighted Bilhah his father's *concubine*, the intent of the rather uncomplimentary reference was to indicate that Reuben considered her but a concubine unworthy of esteem; had she not been a maidservant, the incident would not have occurred [see *comm.* there] ...

Alternatively, while Rachel and Leah were alive, the Torah calls Bilhah and Zilpah *maidservants* and *concubines*. But now that Rachel and Leah were dead [see *Seder Olam* cited above] Jacob gave Bilhah and Zilpah the status of *wives* (Ramban).

See *comm.* to 30:7 where Haamek Davar makes the observation that

although Rachel had freed Bilhah, the Torah still refers to her as שִׁפְחַת רָחֵל, *Rachel's maidservant*, to intimate that after having given birth Bilhah had continued to treat her still childless mistress with respect, unlike Hagar who treated the childless Sarah with lowered esteem after having given birth to Ishmael.

— וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דִּבְתָּם רָעָה אֶל־אָבִיהֶם [And] Joseph would bring evil reports about them to their father.

Whatever evil Joseph noticed in the sons of Leah, he reported to his father. He accused them of eating limbs torn from living animals, of treating the sons of the maidservants contemptuously by calling them slaves, and of suspicion of immoral behavior. Joseph was punished measure for measure [and in effect the Torah later vindicates the brothers as having been guiltless in his allegations (Yerushalmi Peah 1:1)]. When the brothers sold Joseph [v. 31] the Torah tells us that they *slaughtered* a he-goat and did not eat it live [intimating that they were not to be suspect of eating limbs torn from living animals, since 'even in the very act of wrongdoing they slaughtered ritually' (Midrash)]; in punishment for Joseph's 'gossip' that they called the sons of the maidservants *slaves*, Joseph himself was sold for a slave; and because he accused them of immorality, he himself was accused of immorality by Potiphar's wife [39:7] (Rashi from Tanchuma).¹¹

1. Nearly all commentators agree that Joseph truthfully reported what he saw and that he was not slandering his brothers. Two obvious questions arise: (a) Why was Joseph punished for telling the truth? (b) How could the sons of Jacob be guilty of such charges? The consensus of the commentators is as follows:

— The brothers acted according to their understanding of the laws, but Joseph considered them to have acted improperly because he interpreted the law differently. He would then bring evil reports concerning them back to his father — based on his own assumptions. This is the intent of וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דִּבְתָּם רָעָה ... [he] brought evil reports about them to their father. The verse emphasizes the evil manner of the reports rather than of the deeds, as if to imply that

37 *Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph would bring*
2 *evil reports about them to their father.*

[For alternate interpretations of what these evil reports consisted, see below s.v. רָעָהם רָעָה.]

Ramban disagrees with *Rashi's* interpretation that the evil reports were about the sons of Leah. He maintains that the evil reports concerned the last-mentioned subject of our verse: the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah whom he always associated with. *Ramban* argues that according to *Rashi*, the sons of Leah may well have hated Joseph but the others, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah whom he befriended and defended, should have been loyal to him and protected him when Leah's sons conspired to kill or sell him. But as the narrative below makes clear, all the brothers [except Reuben and Benjamin (*R' Bachya*)] consented to Joseph's sale — the sons of Leah because they were jealous of him as a result of their father's love for him [next verse], and the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah because of his slanderous reports. Furthermore, it appears from *Bereishis Rabbah* [84:7] that Joseph's slander involved all the brothers.

Accordingly, *Ramban* suggests that Joseph spent all his leisure time with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah and brought

evil reports about them to his father, thus incurring their hatred. When the sons of Leah saw the favoritism their father showed Joseph [next verse], they too hated him. He was accordingly hated by all his brothers: by the sons of the maidservants because of his evil reports, and by the sons of Leah out of jealousy [and, as we shall see later, also for his dreams].

Mizrachi defends *Rashi* by maintaining that the reason the sons of the maidservants did not protect him from being sold was because of Joseph's dreams, but not because he slandered them. As the sons of maidservants they did not expect of Jacob to show them the same love as the son of Jacob's favorite wife, and therefore were not jealous of Jacob's favoritism, however, they were incensed at the implication of Joseph's dream — which affected them all — that they would have to be subservient to Joseph who would rule over them.

רָעָהם רָעָה — *Evil reports about them* [lit. their gossip (which was) evil].

Rashi interprets the noun רָעָה as gossip. It is related to the same root

their actions were not intrinsically evil, but Joseph's reports about them (רָעָהם) — which reflected the way he perceived their actions — were brought רָעָה, in an evil manner. He could have interpreted their actions favorably, but he did not. Whatever he could interpret as evil, he did, and he conveyed the facts to Jacob according to his own interpretation. He was therefore punished for all three reports:

a) The charge that they ate limbs from living animals. The brothers would slaughter an animal and, כְּעוֹרָה מְסַרְסֶסֶת, while the animal was still having spasmodic movements, they would cut off a piece of flesh and prepare it for eating. They did this because as the Talmud observes [*Chullin* 33a] such meat is healthy [presumably because it is then freshest]. Of course, as the Talmud *ibid.* notes, one must first ritually salt and soak the meat before eating it, and, as is further noted in *Sanhedrin* 63a, it may not be eaten until the animal 'dies,' i.e., its spasmodic movements have ended.

Such action is permitted to Jews only since the criterion for Jews is that an animal be kosher-slaughtered. Once that has been accomplished, and though it still might make spasmodic movements it is no longer considered חַי מִן הָחַי, flesh [lit. a limb] from a living animal, and one may — even while it is still moving — cut a limb from it. However, the meat may not be eaten as long as the animal shows signs of life [because of the prohibition in *Lev.* 19:26 you shall not eat with the blood; see comm. there; cf. *Sanhedrin* 63a; *Yoreh Deah* 27:1].

Gentiles, too, are charged with the prohibition of tearing limbs from a living animal [see 9:4], but there is a basic difference: Gentiles may kill an animal in any manner they see fit, but they are enjoined that the animal be completely dead and not show any signs of life before a

וישב אל-אביהם: וישראל אהב את-יוסף לזג

as *robb*, causing to speak, in Song of Songs 7:10. Our passage denotes that whatever ill Joseph could speak regarding them, he told his father.

Ramban explains that according to Rashi's interpretation רבה, gossip, can refer either to good or evil reports; hence the Torah adds that the report

about them was רעה, evil. Whenever the Torah uses the expression כביא רבה, lit. brings gossip, it refers to truthful reporting [and perhaps even suggests the 'bringing' of proof (*Akeidas Yitzchak*)] of what one has actually seen as in our case [where Joseph told the truth as he perceived it, even though he misinterpreted the facts; see footnote],

limb may even be torn from it [see *Chullin* 33a]. In their case it is not dependent upon slaughter, but upon death. Accordingly while the slaughtered animal is moving, its meat is forbidden to gentiles but permitted to Jews. In any case, as noted above, even a Jew may not eat the torn-off limb until it is soaked and salted, and the animal has died.

The Talmud cites another opinion, the prevailing one, that in the cases of kosher animals, gentiles too may tear the flesh immediately after a kosher-slaughter in accord with the principle that לית מידי רלישאל שני ולקרי אסור, there is nothing which is permitted to Israel, but is forbidden to a gentile. Therefore, since Israelites may cut off flesh from kosher animals immediately after slaughter, it would be incongruous to forbid gentiles to engage in that very practice.

Joseph's evil report resulted from confusion over the above halachah. Following his own opinion, Joseph considered the brothers to be in violation of the law when he observed them cutting flesh from a just-slaughtered animal, before it had stopped moving. In accord with his own view, he told Jacob that the brothers were eating the flesh of living animals. He was wrong, either because Jacob's family had voluntarily obligated itself to observe the laws of kosher slaughter and thus had the status of Jews; or because even gentiles are not forbidden in the case of kosher animals.

The report was in effect malicious since Joseph should have judged them in a more favorable light and reported all the facts. For not doing so, he was punished (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*; *Levush*; cf. *Tzeidah LaDerech* and *Yafeh Toar*).

[There is also an opinion that he considered them to still have the status of gentiles since the Torah was not yet given. Though they practiced kosher-slaughtering voluntarily, he erroneously thought they were still bound by restrictions incumbent upon gentiles and were not permitted to tear off a limb of an animal until all spasmodic movement stopped]

There is a further opinion [cf. *Tzeidah LaDerech*; *Sifsei Chachamim*] that the 'living animals from which the brothers tore limbs' were בני פקיעה, lit. plucked out children – a designation for fully grown calves – dead or alive – found inside a kosher-slaughtered animal. Even if such a calf survives its mother's slaughter and grows to maturity, it may be eaten without slaughter – as long as its mother was kosher-slaughtered. [The Sages later prohibited this practice because of קראית עין, it would appear as though a transgression had been committed (see *Yoreh Deah* #13:2)]. Joseph, however, was under the impression that such animals required kosher-slaughter, and when he saw his brothers – who were following Torah law tearing their flesh without slaughtering them, he reported the 'sin' to their father without specifying the nature of the circumstances.

b) The charge that they referred to the sons of the maidservants as 'slaves.' What actually occurred was that they would taunt the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah by reminding them that their mothers had been servants of Rachel and Leah before Jacob freed and married them (*Mizrachi*).

Or the insult was in the figurative sense: By not socializing with them it was as if the other brothers were designating them as slave children (*Gur Aryeh*).

c) The charge of immorality. Joseph was super-righteous; he subscribed to the view [see *Kiddushin* 70a] that one may not associate at all with women. Therefore it irked him to see his brothers conduct trade with women. However the Halachah permits such commerce and non-personal association [see *Yoreh Deah Even HaEzer* 21:6]. A righteous person, however, does not even glance at women, and he might tend to suspect those who are lax in this regard. Joseph assumed the worst of his brothers and would paint a black picture of their behavior to their father (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*).

whereas when the expression is מוציא רבה, lit. 'extracts gossip' [as in the case of the Spies (see *Numbers* 13:32)] it refers to a fabrication of false gossip.

Ramban, however, maintains that רבה in itself refers to evil gossip. The Torah adds the redundant term רעה, evil, as a superlative to magnify the evil nature of the report.

According to Radak, the intent is that Joseph reported the evil that all his brothers spoke about him [Joseph]. He reported that they hated him and berated him, for as the next verse proceeds to tell us, Joseph was Jacob's favorite child.

Only Ibn Ezra of all the commentators interprets that the evil report is explicit in the Torah. As noted above, he maintains that the evil report was the fact that he was made a נער, servant, to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah.

It was, in a sense, to Joseph's credit that he reported these infractions to their father only but did not spread them about. He refrained, as the younger brother, from rebuking them directly, but instead reported them to his father in the hope that he would reprimand them (*Akeidas Yitzchak; Abarbanel*).

Hoffmann elicits this interpretation of Joseph's sincerity from the fact that the verse does not say that he brought evil reports to his father, but to their father — the father of them all — so that Jacob would reprimand his children and correct their misconduct.

[This follows the primary view that Joseph truthfully reported what he believed to have been their actions as he interpreted them. See footnote.]

3. The Torah now details for us the additional cause for the brothers' hatred of Joseph: jealousy over Jacob's obvious favoritism for him (*Radak*).

וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת־יֹסֵף מִכָּל־בָּנָיו — Now [lit. and] Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons.

It emerges that Joseph's tale-bearing would not have been sufficient cause for the brothers to despise him to such a degree. Rather it was the combination of his tale-bearing coupled with their jealousy of Jacob's blatant favoritism that caused all the brothers to unite against him (*Alshich; Or HaChaim; see Ramban* above).

Midrashically, Joseph is considered a prototype presaging the destiny of the Jewish nation. His father's excessive love caused him to be hated by his brothers. They drove him from his father's house and, eventually, this led to the exile of the whole family. In the same way, all the heathen nations hate the people of Israel because God loves them and has associated Himself with them (*Tanchuma Yashan*).^[1]

By referring to Jacob as *Israel* — [the name used to reflect Jacob's spiritual

1. Although Jacob is generally held to have erred in showing partiality to Joseph [see footnote end of next verse], the *Zohar* differs. The *Zohar* recalls that God Himself openly proclaims His affection for Jacob/Israel and His hatred of Esau and declares it formally through the prophet Malachi [1:2, 3] and others. Similarly, the three Patriarchs did not hesitate to demonstrate their love for one child, even though this might arouse feelings of hostility among the other children. When true love is the product of goodness and justice, it excludes everything which stands in its way; if the expression of love is inhibited, it is diminished and, to that extent, it becomes less true. When the Patriarchs showered greater love on one of their children, it was because they recognized that child as the true guardian of their spiritual heritage. Jacob knew full well that love for one could provoke the hatred of others, but he gave Joseph his love without reservation, even though it might cause fierce hostility on the part of the brothers. So too, God never concealed His love for His 'chosen people,' although it called forth the rancor and hatred of the nations.

Thus the struggle between the rival brothers of the Patriarchal family, as well as of the vast

וישב לו בְּתֵנֶת פָּסִים: וִירָאוּ אָחִיו בְּיָאתוֹ מִכָּל-בָּנָיו כִּי-בֶן-זָקֵנִים הוּא לוֹ וְעָשָׂה

role (*R' Bachya*) — the verse emphasizes that this love had a *spiritual* origin, because Jacob saw in Joseph the making of an exceptional man.

However, as noted in the footnote to the end of this verse, it was an error for Jacob to *openly display* this love.

Since he was a child of his old age [lit. for a son of old age was he to him].

The translation follows Rashi who comments: *For he was born to him in his old age*. Rashi cites the alternative interpretation of Onkelos who renders: he was a *wise son* to him. [This interpretation follows the Talmudic dictum that זָקֵן, *old*, refers to שָׂקֵנָה חֲכָמָה, *one who acquired wisdom*.] Whatever Jacob learned in the Academy of Shem and Eber [during his fourteen years there (see 28:10 s.v. וַיִּלֶּךְ חֲרָנָה), he transmitted to Joseph.¹]

Alternatively, [following the *Midrash*, the word זָקֵנִים, *old age*, alludes to a contraction of זָקֵנִים וְיָפִים, *facial features*] — Joseph's facial features resembled Jacob's. [Cf. on 21:3 s.v. לִזְקֵנוֹ where a similar *Midrashic* interpretation is given regarding Isaac's physical resemblance to Abraham.]

Ibn Ezra, like Rashi, explains that Joseph was referred to as a *child of his*

old age since Jacob begot him in his old age when he was ninety-one years old [see calculation "B" in footnote to 35:29. Jacob was born in the year 2108 from Creation, and Joseph in 2199]. They likewise referred to his brother Benjamin a *little son of his old age* [44:20].

Ramban disagrees with this interpretation which singles out Joseph as the child born in Jacob's old age, since all Jacob's children were born to him in his old age, Issachar and Zevulun being but a year or two older than Joseph! (cf. *comm.* end of 30:24). [Additionally, the implied difficulty is that if the term refers to the *youngest* child born in old age, then it should apply only to Benjamin, not Joseph.]

Ramban maintains that the term בְּנֵי זָקֵנִים [lit. *son of old age*] refers to the custom of old men to choose one of their children to attend to their personal needs. Joseph was the son chosen by the aged Jacob to *look after him in his old age* and to remain at his side constantly. That is why Joseph did not accompany his brothers when they went to pasture the flocks in distant places. Joseph's constant attendance naturally increased Jacob's affection for him, especially since, as the Sages note, Joseph had the understanding of an elder, and Jacob imparted to him his knowledge of Torah. In the case of Benjamin, however, [see 44:20] the term is to be understood literally as *son of his old age*. This is supported by Onkelos, too,

'family of nations,' finds a fertile breeding-ground in the choice of the privilege of love. Apparently this struggle is necessary for the conquest of moral perfection and for the ultimate triumph of good. Without such struggle, mankind would lapse into stagnation and indolence (*R' Munk*).

1. That Jacob chose to teach Joseph what he had learned at the Academy was prophetic. Eber, who headed the Academy after Shem's death, was surely not superior to Isaac in his knowledge of Torah, nevertheless Jacob chose to spend fourteen years studying at the Academy although he was already sixty-three years old and an accomplished student of Isaac. Jacob had to prepare for a long exile with Laban, and he had to equip himself with the spiritual tools that would enable him to remain strong even when he was away from the environment of Isaac and Rebecca. To do that, he went to Eber. Those were the teachings Jacob conveyed to Joseph, for Joseph, like his father, would be forced to endure a personal exile of twenty-two years (*Sh'lah*).

for in the case of Benjamin *Onkelos* renders the term as *בן סביון*, *son of old age*, while here he renders it as *בן חכמים*, *a wise son*. Therefore, unlike its description of Benjamin, the Torah does not limit itself to the observation that Joseph was merely a *בן זקנים*, but qualifies it by adding the possessive *הוא* *to him*, i.e., Joseph was considered by Jacob as *his* son, to whom he would impart his Torah learning, and who would look after him in his old age.

Mizrachi and *Gur Aryeh* defend the interpretation of *Rashi* [and *Ibn Ezra*] against *Ramban's* criticism by noting that Jacob begot no children after Joseph for a period of about eight years before Benjamin was born. Throughout this period, Joseph was the youngest child, and he quite naturally acquired the nickname *בן זקנים*, *a child of old age*. Furthermore, Joseph was the only child of the beloved Rachel, and Jacob may well have despaired of having more children after the passage of so many years. By the time Benjamin was born eight years later, Jacob's love of Joseph as the 'ben zekunim' had become so firmly rooted, that it could not be displaced by the birth of Benjamin. Furthermore, Joseph proved to be the wisest of them all, and Benjamin was but a child at the time.

Onkelos [who renders the term here as meaning *wise son*] does not accept the interpretation that Jacob loved Joseph as a son of his old age because, if so, the brothers would not have despised Joseph since it is only natural for an elderly father to love such a child. *Onkelos* therefore adopts the interpretation that Jacob loved Joseph since he perceived him to have superior wisdom; this could be a cause of jealousy (*Gur Aryeh*).

Abarbanel suggests that while Joseph acted childishly (*נער*), *and he was a youth* when he was with his brothers, his behavior toward Jacob, in contrast, was different. With him, Joseph acted as a *בן זקנים*, *a person of maturity*; thereby he won Jacob's love.

Chizkuni suggests that Benjamin never quite captured Jacob's heart the way Joseph did because Jacob always associated Benjamin's birth with the death of his beloved wife, Rachel, who died while giving birth to him.

R'Hirsch in 21:3 explains *זקנים*, *old age*, as the time when a person reflects upon the accomplishments and experiences of his life, and looks forward to passing them on to a child who can take his place and carry on. The son who is best suited to succeed his father is called his *בן זקנים*, *the child of his old age*, i.e., the heir to his fund of experience. This is the implication of the Sages' teachings that Joseph resembled Jacob's *זיו איקונים*, literally 'splendor' of his image. The word *splendor* suggests more than facial resemblance — Jacob's splendor was his role and accomplishment. It was this aspect of Jacob's spiritual image that Joseph resembled as his *בן זקנים*.

וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ בִּתְּנָת פָּטִים — [And] he made [for] him a fine woolen tunic.

The translation follows *Rashi*: A garment of fine wool. The word is similar to *כרס* in *Esther* 1:6 [which is explained in *Megillah* 12a as a compound word: *כר*, *cushion*, of *פס*, *fine wool*. We find the same sort of garment mentioned in the story of David's children Amnon and Tamar [which would imply that it was a very fine garment, suitable for members of a royal family; see *II Samuel* 13:18ff (*Mizrachi*; see *Gur Aryeh* and *Tzeidah l'Derech*)] (*Rashi*).¹¹

Rashi adds that Midrashically, the word *פסים* may be interpreted as an acronym an-

1. Based on the unbridled hatred that ensued from the favoritism Jacob showed Joseph, the

וישב לזה אָהב אָבִיהֶם מִכָּל-אַחֵיו וַיִּשְׁנָאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוּ לְשָׁלֹם: וַיַּחֲלֵם יוֹסֵף

anticipating the troubles that were to befall Joseph as a result of the פְּסִים כְּהֵנָּה, as he was soon to be sold from one owner to another: the פ represents Potiphar; the ס, the סוֹחְרִים, merchants; the י, the יִשְׁמָעֵלִים, Ishmaelites; and the מ, the Midianites (Rashi).

Other interpretations are:

— A long-sleeved garment which reached to יָדָיו, פֶּסֶם, the palms of his hands (Midrash) [(or according to Pesikta Zutresa: the soles of his feet)], in contrast with the shorter tunics generally worn at the time. Such long sleeved garments which reached over the wrists as well as long garments which reached the soles of the feet were a symbol of nobility inasmuch as they indicated that the wearer was not meant for manual labor (Maharzu). With fatherly love, Jacob saw that Rachel's first-born son would become master of the family, but as the Sages observe, it was a mistake for Jacob to show it [see footnote].

— An embroidered robe (Targum Yonasan).

Yafeh Toar emphasizes that the

above interpretations are not mutually exclusive: It was a long-sleeved embroidered tunic, made of variously colored strips of fine wool.

— The tunic which designated him for leadership (Sforno).

It would appear that after Reuben 'disarranged his father's bed' and the birthright was transferred to Joseph [see above 35:22 and I Chron. 5:1], Jacob made the special garment to distinguish Joseph as the new possessor of 'first-born' status, who was now qualified to perform the sacrificial service. This might also be the connotation of בְּרִי, the son whom he now considered the 'eldest' — the 'firstborn' — of all the children (Kli Yakar).

Me'am Loez mentions a tradition that the tunic was the garment that Jacob received from Esau when the latter sold him his birthright. This garment originally belonged to Adam; it would fit only a firstborn

Sages proclaimed that: "A man should never single out one child among his other sons, for on account of two sela's weight of the fine woolen [garment] which Jacob gave Joseph in excess of his other sons, his brothers became jealous of him, and the matter resulted in our forefathers' descent into Egypt" (Shabbos 10b; see Rambam, Laws of Inheritance 6:13, and Choshen Mishpat 282). (Cf. Zohar cited in the footnote above.)

Actually, as Tosafos observes, the Egyptian servitude had already been decreed since Abraham's time at the Covenant Between the Parts [15:13ff (nearly 200 years earlier)], but without this unjustified hatred perhaps the oppression would not have been so severe.

Maharsha explains alternatively that were it not for these events the immediate cause of the decreed descent to Egypt would not have been a family tragedy whereby the brothers sold their own flesh and blood into slavery. Instead the cause would have been one that would not disgrace the righteous sons of Jacob. According to Torah Temimah, the Covenant Between the Parts did not specify Egypt as the country of oppression; it was as a result of the sequence of events evolving from the jealousy that Egypt became the place. [See also footnote on page 455.]

* * *

Why does the Talmudic ruling above read 'A man should never [לֹא יִשְׁנָה אֶם] single out ...'? It would have sufficed to read: אֵל, יִשְׁנָה אֶם, 'A man should not single out ...'. What is the significance of *never*?

Apparently Jacob, too, was quite aware what jealousy among children could cause. But he was under the false impression that in the case of his righteous children it would be different. As the Sages observe, even Jacob miscalculated in this matter. From Jacob's bitter experience, the Sages derive that a man should *never* single out one of his children — not even in a situation where he is convinced that his children are better and would be unaffected by such distinction (Harav David Feinstein).

37 whom their father loved most of all his brothers so
4 they hated him; and they could not speak to him
peaceably.

son. Since the birthright had been taken away from Reuben because of the incident with Bilhah, the garment was now given to Joseph. [According to this tradition the phrase *he had made him* would have to be understood in the sense of *provided him*.]

According to *Malbim* Jacob presented Joseph with this tunic because, unlike the other brothers who tended the sheep, Joseph was always in attendance on Jacob [see *Ramban* above on וְקָנִים]. It was only fitting that Joseph be garbed beautifully when performing the *mitzvah* of serving his father. Similarly, Esau, who was renowned for his great filial devotion, wore special garments while waiting upon his father [27:15].

4. וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי־אָהֵב אֱתָהּ אֲבִיהֶם ... [And] his brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved ... so [lit. and] they hated him. They saw — i.e., they perceived from the tunic that what they hitherto only suspected was obviously true (*Hoffmann*).

The construction of the verse stresses the word *he*. The most galling thing to the brothers was that of all the members of the family, Jacob's affections were centered on *him* — the one who had no friendly relations with them and who drew the reproaches of their father on them (*R' Hirsch*).

Our verse describes hatred that resulted from Jacob's affection. Accordingly, 'brothers' here refers to the sons of Leah; they were jealous of Joseph because they felt equally

entitled to Jacob's love. The sons of the *maidservants*, however, were not jealous of Jacob's partiality for Joseph — they knew that they could not expect to equal the favor shown the son of Jacob's favorite wife; they hated Joseph for his evil tale-bearing. Additionally, as we shall see, all of the brothers hated him for the implication of his dreams: that he would reign over them and they would be subservient to him (*Ramban*; *Mizrachi*).

Abarbanel suggests that all the brothers hated Joseph because they interpreted Jacob's preference for him to mean that Jacob planned to disinherit them. Just as Abraham disinherited Ishmael and the sons of Keturah in favor of Isaac [25:5ff], and Isaac disinherited Esau in favor of Jacob, they feared that Jacob was grooming Joseph at their expense to be the sole heir to the blessings and the land.

וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבָּרוֹ לְשָׁלוֹם — And they could not speak to him peaceably.

— I.e., even peaceably. They could not speak at all with him: certainly not regarding matters of contention, but not even regarding general, peaceful matters (*Ibn Ezra*; *Yohel Or*).

Abarbanel [based on *Tanchuma Yashan*] interprets: They could not respond to his greetings of 'Shalom.' He would come and ask after their welfare and they would not answer him.

Cf. *R' Hirsch*: They could not bear his speaking for peace. They took nothing from him in a friendly spirit; interpreted everything he said in a bad way, and, most of all, misunderstood any friendly advances.

וישב חלום נִגְד לְאָחִיו וַיִּסְפּוּ עוֹד שָׁנָא לְזוֹ אָתּוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמַעוּ-נָא הַחֲלֹם

According to *Radak*: They could not converse with him peaceably, but constantly quarrelled.

Though they *had* to speak with him regarding household matters and shepherding with which he was involved at Jacob's command, they could not do so peaceably as brothers (*Sforno*).

That the brothers openly expressed their bitter feelings to Joseph and did not suppress their hatred follows the following *Midrash* cited by *Rashi*:

From [what is written here about] the disgrace [of the Tribal Ancestors] you may learn their virtues: They did not pretend what they did not feel [lit. 'they did not speak one thing in their mouth having another in their hearts'].

5. Joseph's dream.

Dreams of which Scripture speaks are generally interpreted to be vehicles of prophecy. See *comm.* to 28:12. Dreams play a significant role in Joseph's life as will be discussed in the commentary and *Overview*.

Our Sages in *Berachos* 55a leave as an open question whether dreams have any meaning. To be sure, Joseph's dreams, and those of Pharaoh and his officials contain revelations of future events which can originate only from a transcendent Source. That Providence uses this half-conscious state to prophetically introduce thoughts in people's minds and thereby to cause whole series of events to happen, and that God uses peoples' belief in dreams to achieve this end we see repeatedly from Jacob's and Joseph's history, as well as from the prophetic dreams of Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar and Gideon. All were prognostications and fulfilled according to their interpretations.

The commentators grapple with a dif-

ficult philosophic question: In view of the fact that God determines the sequence of events in advance, why should any responsibility fall upon the actors who carry out God's plan? Are they not mere puppets?

This problem, which touches the very core of the relationship between predestination and man's free will, is approached through various perspectives. In the final analysis, however, as *Rambam* [*Hilchos Teshuvah* 5:5] states, this eternal problem cannot be resolved in terms of human thought processes which are fundamentally different from Divine Thought. Although it is incumbent upon us to understand as much as we can, we must not forget that human analysis is totally inadequate to comprehend fully the interplay of human deeds and Providential acts (*Radak*; *R'Hirsch*; *R'Munk*).

[And] Joseph *dreamt a dream*. — וַיִּחְלֹם יוֹסֵף חֲלֹם

The Torah itself tells us that Joseph truly had a dream. This negates any possible suspicion on our part that Joseph *fabricated* the dream to gain superiority over them (*Or HaChaim*).

It is not clear, however, whether the dream mentioned in this verse is the one described in the next verse.

Most commentators maintain that this *was* the dream described below. Our verse, stating that Joseph became even more hated by his brothers because of his dreams, is a general introduction to the ensuing narrative. The next verse proceeds to *detail* the exchange that led to this intensified hatred.

However, *Chizkuni* is of the opinion that the dream of our verse is not recorded because it was not fulfilled.

R'Hirsch perceives the continuity of verses 5 and 6 to be that Joseph had a dream [v. 5] and *started* telling it to his brothers in a general way: 'I had a

37 ⁵ Joseph dreamt a dream which he told to his
5-6 brothers, and they hated him even more. ⁶ He said to
 them, 'Hear, if you please, this dream which I

dream ...' but as soon as he innocently started speaking, they cut him off. He persisted, however [v. 6], insisting that the dream was too important for them to ignore.

Kli Chemdah similarly offers that the phraseology of the verses suggests that Joseph had a dream not recorded in the Torah. נִגְדָה לְאָחָיו, and he told his brothers (not: לְאָחָיו, and he told it to his brothers) — i.e., he merely told them he had a dream, but they did not give him the opportunity to describe it. When he had the dream described in the next verse however he urged them to listen to it since it affected them greatly. [Comp. Haamek Davar below.]

נִגְדָה לְאָחָיו — Which [lit. and] he told to his brothers.

If Joseph knew that relating the dream would provoke their hatred, why, indeed, did he relate it to them?

The commentators grapple with this and the opinions vary.

— Sforino suggests that this was an example of the young Joseph's immaturity.

— Perhaps Joseph wanted to justify Jacob's excessive love for him by emphasizing that his future greatness was decreed by Providence [and would not come as a result of Jacob's preferential treatment (Chizkuni)]. Thereby he hoped to remove their hatred.

— Alternatively, he wanted to end their hatred by making them realize that he would yet rise up to greatness and they would some day need him and have to bow down to him. Becoming aware of this they

might stop hating him, being afraid of possible later retribution (Or HaChaim).

— Lekach Tov observes that Joseph implored them to listen to the dream because as the Sages said [Berachos 55b]: 'An uninterpreted dream is like an unread letter.' To be effective it must be communicated and interpreted.

— Vilna Gaon notes that since Joseph understood the dreams to be prophetic in nature, he was required to reveal them lest he be guilty of the grievous sin of withholding a prophecy [נִבְּאָהוּ] from those for whom it was intended.

וַיִּסְפּוּ עוֹד שׂוֹא אוֹתוֹ — And they hated him even more [lit. and they increased more to hate him].¹¹

Since they understood him to be claiming that he was their superior (Or HaChaim).

Abarbanel interprets that their hatred increased as soon as he started telling the dream to them [see R'Hirsch above] because they assumed he was fabricating the matter. But he pressed on and insisted on telling it to them.

6. According to most commentators, as noted, after having introduced this topic in the previous verse, the Torah now proceeds to detail their conversation.

שָׁמְעוּ-נָא הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חִלְמָתִי — Hear, if you please, this dream which I dreamt.

He urged them to listen to it.

1. Midrash HaGadol observes that Joseph fell because of a dream, and achieved greatness because of a dream: He fell because of a dream as evidenced by the hatred of his brothers which resulted from this dream; he owed his prodigious rise to Pharaoh's dream [chapt. 42].

וַיֹּשֶׁב לִזְזִי וְהִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלַמְתִּי: וְהִנֵּה אֲנִחנוּ
מֵאֲלֵמִים אֲלֵמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה
קָמָה אֲלֵמְתִי וְגַם־נִצְבָּה וְהִנֵּה תִסְבִּינָהּ
אֲלֵמְתֵיכֶם וְתִשְׁתַּחֲוּיֶן לְאֲלֵמְתִי: וַיֹּאמְרוּ
לֹא אֲחִיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם־
מִשּׁוֹל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ וַיֹּסְפוּ עוֹד שְׂנֵא

Haamek Davar explains the flow of verses 5 and 6 as follows: Having dreamt, Joseph hastened to tell his brothers about the dream as if they were his trusted confidantes. In view of the strained relations between them, the brothers regarded his friendliness as hypocritical and insincere, and hated him for it. Nevertheless, since he urged them to listen, they indulged him, not realizing that the dream related directly to them.

Not only did he *relate* the dream to them but he pressed them to *hear* it, i.e. to understand its significance. This resulted only in arousing their hatred even further (*Sforno*).

The definite article *הַהֵן*, this dream, is stressed. Earlier, he told them only that he had a dream. Now he was more specific and implored: Listen to this dream that I told you about before (*Or HaChaim*).

7. וְהִנֵּה — [And] behold!

Joseph used the word *וְהִנֵּה*, behold, three times in his account of the dream. [As observed in the comm. to 28:13 and 31:10] it emphasizes that Joseph's vision was more than a mere fantastic dream: *וְהִנֵּה*, behold, [in the colloquial sense of look!; see!] is used in Scripture to introduce something of *substance* (*Ramban*).^[1]

It is axiomatic that when a dream is perceived as vividly as though one were awake, it attests to the Providential truthfulness of the vision. Therefore Joseph kept emphasizing that such was the case: every facet of the dream was vivid and hence true (*Or HaChaim*).

— אֲנִחנוּ מֵאֲלֵמִים אֲלֵמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה —
We were [lit. are] binding sheaves in the middle of the field.

The theme of this dream was sheaves of wheat. It was in fulfillment of the dream that Joseph's rise to greatness was in conjunction with grain [see *Ramban* below] (*Daas Zekeinim*; *Radak*).

— וְהִנֵּה קָמָה אֲלֵמְתִי וְגַם־נִצְבָּה —
When, behold! my sheaf arose and remained standing.

My sheaf arose — by itself. This intimated that Joseph's rise to greatness would come about without apparent cause — through Providence — and not because they would promote him to it (*Abar-banel*).

That it *remained standing* implied that his rule would endure a long time, as it did. In fact, he was viceroy of Egypt for eighty years — the longest reign recorded in Scripture (*Sforno*).

The rendering of the nearly synonymous terms *וְהִנֵּה* and *וַיֵּרָא* follows *Rashi*: *קָמָה אֲלֵמְתִי*

1. R' *Bachya* writes that the three times Joseph affirmed his dream alluded to the three times that his brothers would have to come to Egypt: (1) when the famine began; (2) when Jacob told them to return [43:2] during which time Joseph revealed himself; (3) when they finally returned with Jacob.

dreamt: 7 Behold — we were binding sheaves in the middle of the field when, behold! — my sheaf arose and remained standing; then behold! — your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.'

⁸ His brothers answered, 'Would you then reign over us? Would you then dominate us?' And they

— my sheaf arose [active voice] erect, וָנָם נִצְבָּה, and remained standing [passive voice] in its place.

Malbim perceives the verb נִצְבָּה to imply resistance. His sheaf remained standing despite attempts to overthrow it.

וְהָיָה תִּסְבִּינָה אֶלְמַחֲיֶכֶם וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוִיין. וְהָיָה — Then [lit. and] behold! — your sheaves gathered around [lit. surrounded] and bowed down to my sheaf.

The symbolism of the 'sheaves' intimidated to Joseph that they would come to bow down to him because of grain. That they gathered around indicated that they would surround him like subjects around a king (Ramban).

Though initially they would try to resist him, they would eventually come around and accept him of their own volition (Abarbanel).

8. The brothers' response.

[The meaning of the dream could not be misunderstood, especially in connection with the fine woolen tunic which singled him out for leadership. It humiliated the brothers]:

הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם-מִשׁוֹל תִּמְשַׁל בָּנוּ — Would you then reign [lit. reign

will you reign] over us? Would you then dominate [lit. rule shall you rule] us?

A מֶלֶךְ, king, rules with the consent of the people, while a מִשְׁשֵׁל, ruler, rules despotically. Our passage accordingly means:

Do you imagine that we will voluntarily accept you as king [הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ] over us or that you will rule [אִם מִשְׁשֵׁל תִּמְשַׁל] over us forcibly? (Ibn Ezra as explained by Yohel Or).^[1]

Onkelos renders: *Do you imagine that you will be a king over us or do you expect to impose yourself as an authority over us?* — since people bow down before both kings and others in positions of authority. [According to this interpretation, the word מֶלֶךְ, king, makes no distinction between one who rules by consent or despotically; rather it refers to the extent of the power he exercises. The word מִשְׁשֵׁל, ruler, from the root meaning *dominion*, implies degree of authority which is lower than that of a king]. The verse accordingly means: Not only will you never be king over us, you will never exercise any authority over us (Ramban).

1. The literal translation of their response: *reign will you reign over us, if rule shall you rule us?* implies a prognostication that he would indeed rule over them, and the repetitive phraseology implies that he would become the ancestor of two kings — Jeroboam and Jehu, and of two judges — Joshua and Gideon. [This is an example of what the Sages term as 'he prophesied without realizing what he prophesied.'] It is as the Sages observe [Berachos 55a]: The significance of all dreams depends on their interpretation (Midrash; Lekach Tov; Zohar) [See footnote to 41:13.]

וַיֹּשֶׁב לִזְטִי
ט אֶתֹו עַל־חֲלֻמָּתֹו וְעַל־דְּבָרָיו: וַיַּחֲלֹם
עוֹד חֲלוֹם אַחֵר וַיִּסְפֹּר אֶתֹו לְאָחָיו
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה חֲלֻמָּתִי חֲלוֹם עוֹד וְהִנֵּה
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאַחֵר עֶשֶׂר כּוֹכָבִים
מְשַׁתְּחִים לִי: וַיִּסְפֹּר אֶל־אָבִיו וְאֶל־
אָחָיו וַיַּגִּיעֲרֵבוּ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מָה

וַיִּסְפֹּר עוֹד שֵׁנָא אֶתֹו עַל־חֲלֻמָּתֹו
— *And they hated him even more—because of his dreams and because of his talk* [lit. words].

I.e. for the dreams themselves and for his temerity in relating them, as well as the boastful manner in which he did so (*Ramban*).

In his brother's eyes, Joseph's visions of lordship betrayed his true aspirations, for, even if it were true that he was having such dreams, it is fair to assume that dreams reflect the fantasies of the dreamer. Moreover, his visions contained the very real potential of fulfillment. That is why they could arouse hostility so intense as to culminate in a conspiracy to murder (*Alshich*. See also *Ramban*, v. 10).

Rashi explains his talk as a reference to his evil reports about them [v. 2].

Dreams is in the plural to imply that they hated him not only because of this particular dream but because they assumed that he was always dreaming of ruling over them (*Abarbanel*), or it refers to other dreams of his which are unrecorded by Scripture, or it anticipates any dreams he was yet to have (*Radak*).

9. Joseph's second dream: *The bowing heavenly spheres.*

The message of this dream — although employing a different

metaphor — is essentially the same as that of the first. The repetition was meant to provide evidence that God is the ultimate Source of the message being conveyed. A dream repeated indicates the certainty of the fulfillment, as we find in 41:32: *As for ... having had the same dream twice, it signifies that the matter has been determined by God and that God will soon carry it out* (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

וַיִּסְפֹּר אֶתֹו לְאָחָיו — *And he related it to his brothers.*

In v. 5, the verb וַיֹּדַע, *and he told*, is used, while our verse employs the verb וַיִּסְפֹּר, *and he related*. In general the root נגד, *told*, denotes a comprehensive and detailed communication of a new experience or observation [see *Isaiah* 42:9], while *relate*, implies a recapitulation of something previously said, and is used often of dreams (*Radak* shoresch נגד; see *Ibn Ezra* to *Exod.* 19:9. But cf. *Kli Chemdah* regarding the omission of the word אֶתֹו, *it*).

וַיֹּאמֶר — *And he said.*

Whereas in v. 6 Joseph asked his brothers to listen to his story, here he simply waited for an opportune time and started telling it to them. He knew that if he would ask them to listen this time, they would surely refuse (*Haamek Davar*).

37 hated him even more — because of his dreams and
9-10 because of his talk.

⁹ He dreamt another dream, and related it to his brothers. And he said, 'Look, I dreamt another dream: Behold! the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.'

¹⁰ And he related it to his father and to his brothers. His father scolded him, and said to him,

וְהָיָה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאַחֵר עֶשְׂרֵי כּוֹכָבִים — Look [or: behold] I dreamt another dream.

— And a recurrent dream indicates the certainty of fulfillment (see *Akeidas Yitzchak* above).

[The word *וְהָיָה*, behold, introduces again that what he was about to reveal was a matter of substance. See v. 7].

וְהָיָה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאַחֵר עֶשְׂרֵי כּוֹכָבִים — [And] Behold! the sun, [and] the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.

Joseph was standing in the east, and the sun, moon and stars were traveling west in their normal orbits; then they turned back on their orbits and went east, dipping low in the heavens so they appeared to bow down' (*B'chor Shor* cited by *Torah Sheleimah*).

[The symbolism of the dream (as apparently understood by *Rashi* following *Berachos* 55b; cf. *Ramban* below) was: The sun represented his father, the moon, his mother (actually Bilhah who raised him after Rachel's death, see below); the eleven stars, his brothers who later bowed down to him in Egypt.]

The first dream, as noted, represented their motive in bowing to Joseph — not in recognition of his personal greatness — but because he was the dispenser of grain. When they first bowed, they

were unaware that the all-powerful viceroy of Egypt was their brother. This dream however represented obeisance to Joseph personally, in recognition of the stature, and position he had attained (*Abarbanel*).

10. וְיִסְפֹּר אֶל-אָבִיו וְאֶל-אֶחָיו — And he related [it] to his father and to his brothers.

After having told it to his brothers [v. 9], he repeated it to his father in their presence (*Rashi*).

Joseph did not tell his father the first dream concerning the sheaves because it referred only to the brothers. However, he did tell him this dream, because he understood that the sun in this dream symbolized Jacob (*Ramban*).

His brothers did not interpret the dream and, as noted, 'an uninterpreted dream is like an unread letter.' He therefore repeated the dream to his father in their presence (*Haamek Davar*).

וְיִגְעַר בּוֹ אָבִיו — [And] his father scolded him.

For arousing their hatred [by relating the dream] ... and also to appease the furious brothers (*Rashi*; *Ramban*).

— But Jacob's purpose in scolding him was not because Jacob considered the matter to be impossible (*Mizrachi*).

החלום הזה אשר חלמת הבוא נבוא אני
ואמך ואחריך להשתחית לך ארצה:
ויקנאו־בו אחיו ואביו שמר את־הדבר:

וישב
לזיא

מה החלום הזה אשר חלמת
What is this dream that you have dreamt!

— This is not to be understood as a question, but as a rhetorical outburst like [Psalms 144:3]: 'What is man that You should take cognizance of him!' The intent here is: 'What kind of dream is that? You should not even have repeated such nonsense.' Or the meaning is: 'How dare you dream such a dream! It is nothing but a symptom of the conceit and ambitions that cause you to have such thoughts.' Cf. *Daniel* 2:29 where the verse intimates that dreams are composed of thoughts entertained during the day; cf. also *ibid.* 4:2 (*Ramban*).

[Jacob immediately understood the sun to refer to himself and moon to refer to Joseph's mother]:

הבוא נבוא אני ואמך ואחריך להשתחית
לך ארצה — *Are we to come* [lit. *come, should we come*] — *I and your mother and your brothers — to bow down to you to the ground?*

— Your mother [Rachel] is long dead [so fulfillment of your dream is impossible!]. He [Jacob; or according to *Be'er Mayim Chaim*: Joseph] did not realize that the 'moon' of Joseph's dream referred to Bilhah who reared him like a mother. [The above follows the *Midrash* (cf. *Ibn Ezra*). The Rabbis [in the *Talmud*, *Berachos* 55a], hold that the moon did, indeed, refer to Rachel. Since this part of the dream was obviously not possible of fulfillment, they derive from this portion of Joseph's vision that even a prophetic dream is bound to contain

a portion that will not come true. [Although Jacob surely knew of the tradition concerning unfulfillable portions of dreams (*Mizrachi*), and, as the next verse shows, he *did* take the dreams seriously (*Sefer HaZikaron*), Jacob's purpose in speaking out strongly against Joseph was to remove the jealousy and resentment of the brothers. He therefore attempted to reassure them by intimating that just as the dream was absurd with respect to *Rachel*, so it had no validity with regard to *them* (*Rashi*).

Had Joseph's mother been alive, Jacob would still have rebuked him in this way (*Rashbam*).

Ramban maintains that the 'moon' in the dream does not refer to Bilhah since according to him *all* Jacob's wives had died before Jacob went down to Egypt. *Ramban* derives this opinion from the omission of any reference to Jacob's wives in the genealogy in 46:26. Accordingly, *Ramban* cannot accept *Rashi's* view that the 'moon' symbolized Bilhah.

Ramban theorizes that the moon symbolized the household in general — the seventy souls who would prostrate themselves before Joseph. The stars symbolized the brothers in particular who are singled out because they bowed down to Joseph separately before Jacob and the entire family arrived [see 43:26].

11. ויקנאו־בו אחיו — *So* [lit. *and*] *his brothers were jealous of him*.

Earlier, they *hated* him for the notion of his dream and his temerity

'What is this dream that you have dreamt! Are we to come — I and your mother and your brothers — to bow down to you to the ground?'¹¹ So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

at urging them to hear it. But now they were sure that his dreams of grandeur were not merely products of egotistical fantasies; he would certainly not have an ambition to rule over his father! Obviously, therefore, the dreams were a Providential revelation that he would some day attain greatness, and this inspired jealousy within them (*Alshich; Or HaChaim*).^[1]

וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת הַדָּבָר — But his father kept the matter in mind [lit. safeguarded the matter].

I.e., he waited for its fulfillment (*Rashi*).

Though he scolded Joseph for the reason noted, Jacob respected the dream's reliability, and kept the matter in mind (*Radak*).

The notion of his having to bow before his son did not disturb him as it did his sons, for "of everyone a

man is jealous, except his son and disciple" [*Sanhedrin* 105b] (*Haamek Davar*).

Though Jacob initially thought the dream referred to Rachel who was dead and could not possibly bow down before Jacob, he thought that תחיית המתים, *Resurrection of the Dead*, would take place in his days, and regarded the dream as possible ... According to Rav Chiyyah the passage implies: But his Father [i.e. Jacob's heavenly Father], the Divine Spirit, bade him: keep the matter in mind — it will be fulfilled! (*Midrash*).^[2]

Although we find later that many steps were taken to make Jacob believe that Joseph had died, it was only because Jacob kept his belief in the substance of the dream that he did not assimilate the 'fact' of Joseph's death. This underlying faith in Joseph's survival enabled him to accept and believe the seemingly impossible report that Joseph was alive and had attained greatness [45:28] (*Rashbam*).

1. *R' Bachya* points out that since hatred [especially among people who are close] is generally coupled with jealousy, we already know from the earlier revelations of their hatred (v. 4, 8) that they must have been jealous of him. That our verse speaks of jealousy must, therefore, imply a new kind of emotion. *R' Bachya* explains that one feels jealous of his competitor in a competitive field: a wise man resents a greater scholar, but he has no feelings against a muscular giant. The earlier hatred was an outgrowth of jealousy resulting from Jacob's favoritism for all the sons felt equally entitled to his love — but the brothers still considered themselves superior to the lad who was many years their junior. Now, however, they perceived from his dreams — which, as wise and great people in their own right, they understood — that Joseph was destined to rule over them. This created the conditions of a new form of jealousy; now they viewed him as a peer in wisdom and authority, who was about to surpass them.

2. The *Midrash* continues: Jacob safeguarded the matter: He took a pen and wrote down the dream, recording its precise time and place, and awaiting its fulfillment. He attributed to his own sins the travail of the brothers in Egypt before the dream would be fulfilled and the fact that he would have to bow down to Joseph: 'If my ledger has been scrutinized,' [i.e., if this is punishment for my deeds], Jacob exclaimed, 'what can I do?'

וַיֵּלְכוּ אִתּוֹ לָרְעוֹת אֶת-צֹאן אָבִיהֶם
לְזִבְיָג יֶג בְּשֶׁכֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא

12. The sale of Joseph.

Following the precedent of *Sforno*, we think it our duty to look, if not for a *justification*, then at least for an *explanation* for the event which now follows. After all, we are not dealing with a band of robbers and murderers who would lightly murder for the sake of a coat. *Sforno* refers us to the time when the brothers considered themselves to be in mortal danger and they examined their deeds to find the reason God had punished them (42:21). They found no cause for remorse in the sale of Joseph, but they *did* condemn themselves for hard-heartedly ignoring his pleas for mercy. Clearly they considered the act to have been harsh but not wrong. Accordingly, we must remain alert for any indication which could help make the affair psychologically explainable. This theme will be followed throughout the commentary (*R' Hirsch*). [See *Overview*.]

וַיֵּלְכוּ אִתּוֹ — Now [lit. *and*], his brothers went.

This phrase is separated by the disjunctive *esnachta* from לָרְעוֹת, to *pasture*. The implication is that the true purpose of their trip was not to pasture the sheep, but simply to get away. They were convinced that their rights were threatened by Joseph, and this is why they took advantage of an opportunity to go very far away from his abrasive presence. Shechem is about fifty miles from Hebron. [See continuation below] (*R' Hirsch*).

לָרְעוֹת אֶת-צֹאן אָבִיהֶם — To pasture their father's flock.

The word אֶת is an untranslated accusative particle. Its function is to indicate that the noun following it receives the action of the preceding verb. In our verse, this would mean that the *sheep* were the subjects of the *pasturing*. In our verse, however, the letters of אֶת have dots above them in the Torah's text. [Such dots are meant to indicate that a word is not to be understood in its general meaning (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*).] Thus, we are shown that the *sheep* were not the object of the pasturing as would normally be understood from the word אֶת. Rather they went to *pasture themselves*, that is, to indulge themselves (*Rashi* from *Midrash*; see *Mizrachi*).

With the particle אֶת omitted, the verse would be homiletically rendered: *Now his brothers went to feed [themselves]; their father's flock was in Shechem (Tzeidah laDerech; Sifsei Chachomim).*

It was only ostensibly for the sake of the sheep that they went. In reality, however, their purpose was to "pasture themselves," to preserve their independence which they believed to be jeopardized by Jacob's ideas of Joseph's future (*R' Hirsch*).

Hadar Zekeinim perceives the Hand of Providence in the motive for their trip to Shechem. From that journey, events evolved which made it possible for them eventually to *sustain themselves* in famine. For through the events whose providential roots were in Shechem, Joseph became ruler of Egypt and was enabled to assure sustenance to the flocks of Jacob.

In this context we can better understand Joseph's later comforting statement to his brothers [45:5] *Look! God has sent me before you as a source of*

life. The dotted נָא in our verse — rather than the omission of the particle entirely (see above) — signals this dual connotation: As far as the brothers were concerned, they had gone to *shepherd their father's flock*; the dots, however, draw attention to the Hand of Providence in the matter: they were actually laying the groundwork for sustaining *themselves* — the 'flock of their father' Jacob (*Divrei David*).¹¹

בְּשֶׁכֶם — In Shechem.

— Known for its fertile grazing land (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

They had chosen a spot far from home because they could not bear to witness the favoritism shown Joseph; and possibly they already harbored plans of taking revenge on Joseph, a task that would be easier at a distance. As the Sages observe, Shechem was a spot

foredestined to be the scene of misfortunes [see *Rashi* next verse] (*Abarbanel*; comp. *Ramban* below).

They reasoned that Jacob would probably not send his beloved Joseph to such a treacherous place, and *should* he send him, Jacob would always blame his death on the vengeful inhabitants of Shechem who acted in hatred of Jacob (*Malbim*).

In view of the massacre they had perpetrated against Shechem [ch. 34], it would have seemed foolhardy for the brothers to venture into that city. Nevertheless, the brothers were fearless. They placed their trust in God, Who, as we are told in 35:5, inspired His fear in the surrounding nations soon after the incident occurred, enabling Jacob's family to remain unmolested. Now, with the passage of time, the matter was as much as forgotten (*Radak*).¹²

13. Jacob feels the breach between

1. Similarly the matter may be explained as follows: נָא is usually perceived Midrashically as signalling a רבוי, exegetical amplification [see comm. to 1:1], in this case alluding to themselves: *His brothers went to pasture נָא*, themselves, in addition to אֲבִיהֶם זָכָן, *their father's flock*. The dots over נָא accentuate that within the Divine Scheme, the Hidden Name, amplification of the particle — *themselves* — was more important than their own motive, *the flock*.

They had ostensibly gone to *pasture the flock*, but in reality they were actively responsible for the events that caused *themselves* to be 'pastured' during the later years of famine. True, these events were already pre-ordained at the Covenant Between the Parts when it was foretold to Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved, and the Hand of Providence was guiding throughout. But God's goal, though incontrovertible, could have been achieved by other means. That the brothers were chosen to become God's agents in carrying out His Will by their malicious scheme is because חַוָּה עָלַי רִי חַיִּים, *evil is brought about through the guilty* (*R' David Feinstein*; see *Overview* and footnote to p. 15).

[A similar concept is expressed of Pharaoh in *Semachos* 8: Even had no Pharaoh arisen, Israel was destined to servitude as God specifically foretold. But Pharaoh was chosen for this mission because he was wicked and deserved punishment. See comm. to 15:14, p. 528: 'Egypt as God's Agent; Free-Will and Foreknowledge.']

1. *R'Hirsch* finds great significance in their choice of Shechem. That was the place where family unity and a sense of responsibility for one another were forged. There Simeon and Levi had made the memorable declaration: תְּבוּנָה יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת אֲחֹתִי, *should he treat our sister like a harlot?* [34:31]. Then, when Dinah had been defiled, the entire family stood together for the sake of one of its members who was threatened from without, how much more must they unite when the honor and independence of the *whole* is threatened from within by one member. This could have been their intention. Therefore, they went to Shechem, where the memory of the great deed of fraternity could encourage them to do what seemed to them imperative. For if their fears concerning Joseph's future were justified, they could have cause to feel threatened.

וַיֹּשֶׁב לִזְרֹךְ אֶחָיִךְ רְעִים בְּשֶׁכֶם לָכֵה וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ
 יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הֲנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֶךְ-נָא
 רְאֵה אֶת-שְׁלוֹם אֶחָיִךְ וְאֶת-שְׁלוֹם הָצֹאן
 וְהַשְׁבֵּנִי דְבָר וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ מֵעֵמֶק חֲבֵרוֹן

Joseph and his brethren, and does not want it to grow. At the same time, he wants to test Joseph's feelings towards his brothers, so at first he gives him no special errand, but simply says: 'I think it would be better to send you out to the flocks, to be with the others.' Joseph is at once ready to go. His conscience is quite clear; he has no ambition to be king or dictator (*Ralbag*).

And Israel וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יוֹסֵף
 said to Joseph.

Joseph had remained home in his father's service and did not accompany the flocks when they went to pasture in distant places (*Ramban* on v. 3 s.v. וַיִּקְרָא).

In dispatching Joseph on this fateful mission — preparatory to the Egyptian exile — the Patriarch is referred to here as *Israel* denoting his spiritual aspect as architect of the destiny of his descendants (*R' Bachya*).

הֲלוֹא אֶחָיִךְ רְעִים בְּשֶׁכֶם — Your brothers are pasturing in Shechem, are they not?

I.e., you certainly are aware that your brothers are pasturing in Shechem (*Radak*) ...

... A place wrought with danger for them since they had slain all its inhabitants (*Rashbam* quoting *R' Yosef Kara*).

[Thus, though the brothers themselves feared no revenge from the Shechemites, Jacob's fatherly compassion and fear for his children's welfare and safety overwhelmed him.]

— Come [lit. go (idiomatic)], [and] I will send you to them.

Jacob never suspected that there would be foul play, or he would never have sent Joseph (*Radak*).

The verb form לָכֵה, go, with a suffix ה [as distinct from the usual imperative לֵךְ] denotes a courteous request: go, if you please. It was not a demand since Jacob understood that Joseph might be hesitant to go under the circumstances. When Joseph agreed to go, however, Jacob used [in the next verse] the usual imperative form לֵךְ, go, in specifying the mission (*Abarbanel; Malbim*). [Cf. וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּקְרָא in 27:19.]

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הֲנִי — [And] he said to him, 'I am ready' [lit. here I am].

In this one-word response Joseph was not merely acknowledging his physical presence or responding to the call of his name — the contexts in which this reply usually occurs in the Torah. [Cf. 22:1 and 27:1]. In this case the reply is more significant because Joseph already knew what he was being asked to do. Thus, the commentators explain the response as indicating total preparedness and obedience.

— It is an expression denoting humility and readiness to do his father's bidding, though he was well aware that his brothers hated him [and that it was dangerous to place himself at their mercy] (*Rashi*).

He obediently strengthened himself to comply with his father's bidding; he did not offer the excuse 'How can I undertake such a mission — they hate me!' (*Ramban*).^[1]

Joseph had hoped that reverence

37 brothers are pasturing in Shechem, are they not?
 14 Come, I will send you to them.' He said to him: 'I am ready.'¹⁴ And he said to him, 'Go now, look into the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring me back word.' So he sent him from the depth of Hebron, and he arrived at Shechem.

for their father would prevent them from harming him despite their hatred of him (*Radak*).

14. לִהְיוֹת רֹאֵה אֶת-שְׁלוֹם אֶחָיו וְאֶת-שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן וְהַיִּשְׁבָּנוֹ הַבָּרִי — Go now, look into the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock [lit. see the peace of your brothers and the peace of the flock], and bring me back word.¹⁵

Look into the welfare, etc. — i.e. make an intelligent evaluation of whatever needs improvement and correct it. Obviously if Jacob wanted only a report, he could have sent one of his servants (*Sforzo*).

Jacob made Joseph a שליח מִצְוָה, an agent to perform a mitzvah, inasmuch as he was heeding the command of his father. By asking him to bring back word, Jacob was also, in effect, causing Joseph to be his agent on the return journey as well, thus making that a meritorious mission as well. It is a rabbinic dictum that שליחי מצוה אינם שלוחים גְּזוּרִים, those on a meritorious mission are not harmed (*Alshich; Or HaChaim; Malbim*).

[Despite his long ordeal, Joseph was not physically harmed; to the contrary, he eventually became ruler of Egypt and the source

of sustenance for his family during the famine.

That Joseph suffered at all might be because, as *Rashi* observes below, Shechem was 'a place pre-destined to be the scene of misfortunes,' and, as the *Talmud* notes in *Chullin* 142b and elsewhere, the special protection afforded agents of a mitzvah does not extend to places of unusual danger (*Torah Temimah*). (See *Or HaChaim* cited below, v. 5 s.v. וְהָיָה חֶזֶק who suggests that Joseph forfeited his inviolable status as שליח מִצְוָה when he ventured further than Shechem.)

It is quite natural for one to inquire after his children; but why after the flock? — This proves that one must inquire after the well-being of anything from which he benefits (*Midrash*).

... For R'Aibu said: A man must pray on behalf of the provider of his needs. Therefore, because he benefited from his sheep, drinking their milk and wearing their wool, he had to inquire after their well-being (*Tanchuma Yashan*).

וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ מִעֲמֶמְקָה חֶבְרוֹן — So he sent him from the depth [or: valley] of Hebron.

Jacob escorted him [cf. this meaning of the verb שלח in 12:20 and 24:59] to that point, and dispatched him from there on his mission (*Malbim*).

The Torah mentions the place

1. The *Midrash* praises Joseph for immediately expressing his absolute filial devotion notwithstanding his brothers' hatred for him:

R' Chama bar R' Chaninah said, 'Our father Jacob later remembered these words and grieved to his innermost depths: "I [other versions read: You] knew that your brothers hated you, and yet you answered me 'Here I am?'"

2. Some Sages in *Chullin* 91b derive the dictum that a scholar should not venture out alone at night from our verse. Jacob said 'Go now, see how your brothers are.' The word see implies that he go at a time when he can see, namely, by day. [Others deduce it from 32:25; 23:3; 32:32; and *Ruth* 3:2.]

וישב לוט ויבא שכמה: וימצאֹהוּ אִישׁ וְהִנֵּה תְּעָה בְּשָׂרָה וַיִּשְׁאַלְהוּ הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר מֶה-

from which Joseph was dispatched to emphasize that Jacob was a great distance from his sons. Therefore, they had the temerity to act as they did (*Ramban* cf. *Abarbanel* v. 1).

[The translation *depth of Hebron* instead of *valley of Hebron* reflects the insight of the Sages in the *Midrash* who perceive in this passage an allusion to the workings of Divine Providence. This interpretation is cited by *Rashi* and nearly every major commentator. The concept reappears frequently and in various forms in the reflections of the *Midrashic* Sages in their exegesis to this episode]:

— מַעְמֵק חֶבְרוֹן, *from the valley of Hebron*. But Hebron was situated on a mountain, as it is said [*Numbers* 13:22]: *And they went up into the Negev and came to Hebron!** [Rather, the term מַעְמֵק חֶבְרוֹן, *from the 'valley' of Hebron* is

*[*Torah Temimah* cites *Joshua* 14:12 where Hebron is even more explicitly described as a mountain, and wonders why *Rashi* did not cite that verse.]

to be understood in the *figurative* sense]: Jacob's decision to send Joseph to what appeared to be his potential doom was in fulfillment of עֲצָה עֲמוּקָה, the *profound* [lit. *deep*] design which had been confided to Abraham who is here called חֶבְרוֹן, a contraction of the words נָחָה, *pleasant companion of God*, who was buried in Hebron. The chain of events beginning with Joseph's trip would fulfill God's prophecy to Abraham at the Covenant Between the Parts [15:13]: *Your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own* (*Midrash; Rashi; Targum Yonasan*).¹¹

The *Zohar* records that Jacob took Joseph to Abraham's grave in the 'depth of Hebron,' and from there he dispatched him on his mission.

— וַיָּבֹא שְׁכֶמָה — *And he arrived at Shechem*.

— A place pre-destined to be the scene of misfortunes [מְקוֹם מִוְכָן]. It was there that the sons of Jacob sinned [by selling

1. [Abraham had been informed at the Covenant Between the Parts that his offspring would be aliens in a strange land for 400 years where they would be subjugated and enslaved (15:13). As noted in the commentary there, the 400 years of 'alienation' would begin with the birth of Isaac, while the period of *servitude* would not begin until Jacob's sons emigrated to Egypt. This story of Joseph and his brothers — who appear as agents of Providence — is perceived as the catalyst of the process culminating in the Egyptian Exile.

Thus, the second portion of the prophecy began finding expression in Joseph's mission. Underlying that mission were the hidden workings of Providence: God was sending the descendants of Abraham to Egypt, a land not their own. Jacob and Joseph were unwittingly fulfilling this prophecy — the father in sending, and the son in going to seek his brothers, though neither knew where Joseph's steps would lead him.]

The *Zohar* perceives this by observing that Jacob, who knew how much his sons hated Joseph, should not have exposed his son to such danger; he could have sent others instead. That he nevertheless sent his favorite son against his every natural instinct illustrates the Hand of Providence as the Prime Mover (cf. *Malbim*).

As *R' Munk* writes: 'The people involved in this episode appear as agents of Providence. The Universal plans for the realization of the Messianic goals of history are carried out amidst the comings and goings, the dreams and grudges, the ambitions and vindictiveness of the children of the family of Abraham. And here the Torah gives us an example of the story of a family in which each person remains totally responsible for his acts although in historical

Joseph]; that Dinah was ravished; and that the House of David was later divided [see *I Kings* 12:1] (*Rashi* from *Sanhedrin* 102a).

Although Joseph's sale took place in *Dothan*, that was but a hamlet in the general area of the large city of Shechem. Furthermore, according to the Midrashic interpretation [cited in v. 17 s.v. *כי שמעתי*], *Dothan* was not a place name at all (see *Rashi Sotah* 13b s.v. *משכס ונקברו*; and *Rashi Sanhedrin* 102a s.v. *בשכס קברו*. Cf. *Torah Temimah* §17).

15. וַיִּמְצְאוּ אִישׁ — [And] a man discovered him.

This 'man' was the angel Gabriel. Cf. *Daniel* 10:21 where he is also called 'man' (*Rashi*). He was in the likeness of a man (*Targum Yonasan*).

— He was sent by God to Providentially lead him to his brothers in the ultimate fulfillment of His Plan [see below] (*Ramban*).¹¹

Rashi's exegesis [from *Midrash Tanchuma* and concurred with by most *Midrashim*] that the 'man' was really an angel is based on the fact that in the ensuing exchange, Joseph simply asked about his brothers as though he had not the slightest doubt that the 'man' knew his brother and where to find them. This would not have been the case had he been a mortal. Having established that he

was an angel, the Sages further identified him — on the basis of the appellation 'man' — as Gabriel (*Mizrahi*).

There is another view in the *Midrash* that since 'man' is mentioned here three times there were a total of three angels — each 'man' being understood to refer to someone else. *Midrash HaChofetz* cited by *Torah Sheleimah* suggests that these angels were the same three who appeared to Abraham [18:2].

Ibn Ezra, however, interprets that the man was indeed a mortal wayfarer. Thus, when Joseph inquired about his brothers, he meant: Tell me, if you know. [This does not negate the interpretation that this 'man' was sent by Providence to lead Joseph to his brothers in fulfillment of the Divine scheme.]

וְהִנֵּה תוֹעָה בַּשָּׂדֶה — And behold — he [Joseph] was blundering in the field.

I.e., having come to Shechem, Joseph did not find his brothers in the fields. He proceeded to search the area for them, blundering about from field to field — since he was looking for them in pasture lands — when he stumbled into the 'man' (*Radak*).

This episode is to Joseph's credit. When he did not find his brothers, he

perspective they were acting as שְׁלוּחִים לִקְשׁוֹת, agents of the Divine Providence.'

R' David Feinstein explains the above *Zohar* in the light of *Gittin* 56b. There, the Sages teach that God sometimes causes wise men to make seemingly unwise decisions in order that they be instrumental in bringing about the Divine end. This is based on חֲכָמִים חֲזוּרִים מְשֻׁבִּים וְיִסְדֵּל, *God turns wise men backward and makes their knowledge foolish* [Isaiah 44:25]. Here, too, Jacob's 'error' was part of God's plan.

1. How distressing that a heavenly angel had to be dispatched to create the encounter which placed the brothers in a spiritual dilemma they could not overcome! Would it not have been sufficient to have the Midianites capture and sell Joseph without involving his brothers in the shocking crime?

Were this story to unfold that way, however, we might have questioned God's judgment. We would have said, as did Moses before he understood why Israel deserved such suffering, "Why is this family worse than any other that it suffers such misfortune?" Therefore we must be shown that the brothers' resentment of Joseph's ambitions was so great that they could contemplate such extreme measures against him. That being the case, we can understand why the family had to undergo a purging exile that would purify them sufficiently for spiritual freedom and to receive the Torah (*Oznaim LaTorah*). [See also footnote to vs. 3, 12.]

וּשְׁבִי טו תִּבְקֶשׁ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת־אֲחִי אֲנֹכִי מִבְּקֶשׁ
 לוֹ-טוֹיִי יו הִגִּידָהּ-נָא לִי אֵיפָה הֵם רְעִים: וַיֹּאמֶר
 הָאִישׁ נָסְעוּ מִזֶּה כִּי שְׁמַעְתִּי אֲמָרִים
 נִלְכָּה דַתִּינָה וַיֵּלֶךְ יוֹסֵף אַחֵר אֲחָיו

did not give up his quest and return home even though he had technically obeyed his father by going as far as Shechem. In spite of the danger posed by his brothers' hatred of him, he persisted in his search until he found them. He patiently endured the many difficulties for his father's honor, and in respect of his father's wish that he bring back word. Moreover, this serves to demonstrate that nothing can thwart the Divine purpose notwithstanding man's intentions. The angel was therefore sent to direct him to his brothers, for it is the counsel of HASHEM that will stand (*Rashbam; Ramban*).

The definite article, *the* field, indicates that it was some previously known field. According to *Alshich* it was the field which Jacob had once bought from the Shechemites [33:19].

According to *Or HaChaim* Joseph technically lost his protected status as שליח מִצְוָה, emissary for a mitzvah, when he exceeded the literal bounds of the mission and ventured beyond Shechem, contrary to his father's specific instruction. From that point on — however lofty his intentions — he was on his own initiative and he was vulnerable.

מִהִתְבַּקֵּשׁ — *What do you seek?*

The angel knew what Joseph was seeking. The question was rhetorical — a means of engaging Joseph into conversation (*Oznaim La-Torah*).

[Cf. God's question to Adam: 'Where are you' in 3:9.]

16. אֶת אֲחִי אֲנֹכִי מִבְּקֶשׁ — *My brothers do I seek.*

[Joseph did not say who his brothers were. Either he realized the

'man' was an angel and took it for granted that he knew them, or perhaps there was additional conversation not recorded in the Torah. If the 'man' were a human, it is quite likely that the conversation was more extensive. From *Alshich* it may be inferred that since this was the field Jacob had once bought from the Shechemites (see above), Jacob's sons were familiar and well-known in the area.]

— *Tell me, please, where [i.e., in what part of this region (Sforno)] they are pasturing?*

As an angel, he would certainly know (*Mizrachi*); or following *Ibn Ezra* according to whom he was a human wayfarer, the intent is: *tell me* — if you know.

17. נָסְעוּ מִזֶּה — *They have journeyed on from here [lit. from this, i.e. from this place; cf. 38:21.]*

They are no longer in this pasture and it is pointless to search for them in this vicinity and further (*Sforno*).

[The *Midrash* takes this phrase to be superfluous — he could have answered simply, *I heard them saying, let us go to Dothan*. The *Midrash* also perceives in Joseph's statement that he was seeking אֲחָיו, my brothers, a feeling on his part that he and they were united by feelings of loving brotherhood (*Sifsei Chachomim*). Accordingly, the inner intent of the angel's reply is understood to be:] *'They have departed from [i.e., discarded] any*

37 'What do you seek?' ¹⁶ And he said, 'My brothers do
 16-17 I seek. Tell me, please, where they are pasturing.'
¹⁷ The man said: 'They have journeyed on from here
 for I heard them saying, 'Let us go to Dothan.' So
 Joseph went after his brothers and found them at
 Dothan.

feeling of brotherhood toward you' (Rashi; see Ramban below).

הָיָה לִי שְׁמִיעָתָם אֲמָרִים גִּלְכָּה רְתִינָה — For I heard them [or I heard people (who might be your brothers) (Ramban)] saying, 'Let us go to Dothan.'

I told you that they journeyed from here not because I actually saw them leaving, but because I heard them saying, 'Let us go to Dothan' (Sforno).

In accordance with the Midrashic view that the angel reported that the brothers 'departed from all feelings of brotherhood,' the Midrash — followed by Rashi — interprets: '[I know that they no longer have brotherly feelings to you] For I heard them saying רְתִינָה גִלְכָּה, let us go seek legal pretexts [dothan being homiletically interpreted as a noun meaning דְּתוֹת, laws], with which to put Joseph to death.' According to the literal sense, however, Rashi acknowledges that Dothan is a place, וְאֵין מִקְרָא יוֹצֵא מִדֵּי, פְּשׁוּטוֹ, and the verse does not shed its literal sense.

The above Midrashic interpretation does not imply that the 'man' expressly told Joseph that his brothers had no more love for him and, moreover, were planning to kill him. Had that been the case, Joseph would not have endangered himself by going there. The intent of the exegesis is that the angel spoke to

Joseph in words that had a double connotation — each of them true. Joseph, however, understood only the obvious meaning and followed his brothers to Dothan (Ramban).

Or HaChaim further clarifies that Joseph understood only the obvious meaning since he did not know the 'man' was an angel.

That Dothan is literally the name of a place is, as noted, the common interpretation of this passage.

The expression רְתִינָה means to רְתַן (Hoffmann). Here it is spelled with a yud: רְתִינָה, while later in the verse the yud is omitted: רְתִן. In either case, it refers to the same place (Ibn Ezra).

Dothan, also mentioned in II Kings 6:13-15, was located about fifteen miles north of Shechem. It was known for its broad plains, and its pasturage was reputed to be finer than Shechem's. The name is still preserved in Tel Dothan. The gully of Dothan was a main artery in the trade-route connecting Syria to Egypt via the Sharon Valley (Hoffmann).

[Rashi apparently cites the Midrashic interpretation that Dothan is not the name of a place in consonance with the Talmudic interpretation (Sotah 13b and Sanhedrin 102a) that Joseph was sold in Shechem; accordingly, Shechem refers to the place while Dothan refers to the mood. See v. 14 s.v. וַיָּבֵא שָׂכָה. In the literal sense that Dothan was the name of a place, the Talmudic statement is reconciled by suggesting that Dothan was a hamlet in the general area of Shechem.]

Targum Yonasan renders that the angel said: 'They left here, for I have heard from

1. Baal HaTurim observes that since it was in Dothan that Judah sought to find merit for Joseph (v. 26), he in turn merited that his descendants ruled a period numerically equivalent to the Hebrew word Dothan (דוֹתָן=454 years) from David until Zedekiah. [David reigned 40 years + 4 years of Solomon's reign until he began construction of the Temple + 410 years during which the Temple stood until the Destruction at the end of Zedekiah's reign=454.]

וישב לז-יח-כ וימצאם בדתן: ויראו אתו מרחק ובטחם יקרב אליהם ויתנבלו אתו להמיתו: ויאמרו איש אל-אחיו הנה ב בעל החלמות הלזה בא: ועתה | לכו

behind the Heavenly Curtain of Mystery that the Egyptian exile will begin today, and they were told prophetically that the Hivvites (kinsmen of the Shechemites) are preparing to do battle against them.

— וילך יוסף אחר אחיו וימצאם בדתן — *So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.*

This further emphasizes how Joseph exerted himself in every way — journeying even beyond Shechem to find his brothers — to fulfill his father's mission (*Sferno*).

18. The brothers plot to kill Joseph.

מרחק אתו מרחק — [And] they [the brothers] saw him from afar.

— They recognized him by his special tunic (*Ralbag*).

[And they seized what they believed to be a Divinely afforded opportunity]...

ובטחם יקרב אליהם ויתנבלו אתו להמיתו — *And before he got near them they conspired against him to kill him.*

— I.e. they attempted to kill him before he reached them [by shooting arrows at him (*Tur*)] so they would not have to shed his blood with their own hands. Similarly, the *Midrash* asserts, they in-

cited [sheep-]dogs against him. When they saw that these efforts failed as well, they resolved to kill him themselves [verses 19-20] (*Ramban*).

They reasoned that the incitement of dogs is not considered direct murder. See *Sanhedrin* 76b and *Ramban* to v. 26 s.v. נקרה. *Rokeach* suggests that they considered inciting dogs against Joseph an appropriate punishment for Joseph's tale-bearing activities against them. The Talmud [*Pesachim* 118a] mentions that 'whoever relates slander ... deserves to be cast to dogs,' for it is written [*Exod.* 22:30]: *You shall cast to the dogs, which is followed by you must not carry false reports* [ibid. 23:1]. [This would also explain why they shot arrows, since tale-bearing is likened to shooting arrows.]

The reflexive form ויתנבלו denotes that they became filled with נבלים, crafty plots; אתו, like אתו, with him, means that these designs were aimed at him (*Rashi*).¹¹

Thus, the verb נכל refers to a conspiracy to do evil. *R' Hirsch*, citing analogous verses, defines it as an attempt to do harm in a secret and conspiratorial manner to the noblest interests of others.

They reasoned that their plans would be a supreme test of the truthfulness of his 'dreams'. — If they succeeded in harming him it would prove that his dreams were not Divinely and prophetically inspired [see v. 20] (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

1. According to *Sferno* (and *R' Hirsch*), the construction ויתנבלו אתו instead of ויתנבלו בו changes the meaning from *they conspired against him* to *they regarded him as one who was conspiring against them*. This is analogous to ויתנבלו אתם which does not mean: you shall inherit yourselves with them, but: you shall cause them to be inherited to yourselves ... (*Lev.* 25:46).

They concluded that he was coming to them only to find fault which he could then use to incite Jacob against them. Or possibly he would provoke them to sin, for which they would be punished by God. They would suffer death in this world or punishment in the next, and he alone would inherit the Patriarchal blessings.

Because they were convinced that he was intriguing against them, they felt that whatever

37 ¹⁸ They saw him from afar. And before he got near
18-19 them they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹ And
they said to one another 'Look! That Dreamer is com-

19. נִיאָמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אָחִיו — And they said to one another [lit. man to his brother].

According to the Zohar, man to his brother refers to Simeon and Levi who were truly brothers in all respects. Their anger was the sort that causes death in the world, and Jacob later cursed it when he said (49:5): *Cursed be their anger for it was fierce, and their wrath for it was cruel.* [See 34:25 where Simeon and Levi were similarly those who collaborated as brothers in the massacre of the people of Shechem.]

Cf. Rashi to 49:5 citing Tanchuma: Simeon and Levi are brothers — harboring the same thoughts in the cases of both Shechem and Joseph. For when the Torah states [here]: *And they said man to his brother*, it can only refer to Simeon and Levi. It could not refer to Reuben and Judah since they were opposed to it [verses 21-26]; it could not have been the sons of the handmaids [Dan, Naftali, Gad or Asher] since Joseph associated himself with them [v. 2] and their hatred for him was not so great; Issachar and Zevulun [Leah's youngest sons] are ruled out because they would not have spoken presumptuously before their elders. Consequently it was Simeon and Levi whom their father also referred to as 'brothers'.

R' Zalman Sorotzkin [in *Oznaim LaTorah*] finds it noteworthy that Simeon and Levi should have been more

jealous of Joseph having attained the birthright than Reuben the firstborn, who tried to save Joseph from their hands! They may have felt that their prowess at the massacre at Shechem entitled them to exercise authority over the family.

הִנֵּה בָעַל הַחֲלֻמוֹת הָלֹךְ בָּא — Look! [or: behold] that Dreamer [lit. this master of dreams] is coming!

The remark was contemptuous: Look at him — all wrapped up in his dreams! (*Midrash*); this one who skillfully fabricates dreams to his liking! (*Alshich*); is he coming to tell us yet more of his dreams; does he still think of ways to become our master? (*Abarbanel*).

Sforno — continuing the interpretation cited in the footnote to v. 18 — interprets: 'He purposely told us his dreams to provoke us into taking revenge, thereby making us sin to God and our father so that we would perish.' [And, as noted in the footnote, feeling that Joseph's visit now was a further attempt at entrapment, they rationalized that they had to do away with him to prevent him from harming them.]

The expression בָּעַל הַחֲלֻמוֹת, lit. master of dreams idiomatically refers to one who dreams excessively: a dreamer. Compare the expressions: בָּעַל כְּנָפִים, a winged creature; בָּעַל עֲבִירָה, one who sins excessively; בָּעַל מִוֶּפֶס, a miracle worker; בָּעַל קְרִיאָה, a skilled reader.

Abarbanel, as noted, perceives הַחֲלֻמוֹת to also imply that Joseph was master — in the

course they took would be self-defense. They agreed that it was permissible להמיתו, to kill him — moreover, it seemed morally right to do so, for זהבא להרגך השכם והרגו, if one comes to murder you, arise and kill him!

This verse accordingly explains how the righteous sons of Jacob — whose names were later engraved on the High Priest's חֹשֶׁן מִשְׁפָּט, breastplate [which was known as חֹשֶׁן מִשְׁפָּט, Breastplate of Justice] as a remembrance before God — could unanimously have resolved to kill or sell their brother, an act for which they never expressed regret. For though they later admitted (42:21) 'we are indeed guilty concerning our brother', that was, as they made clear, only over their callousness in ignoring his pleas for mercy, not for the sale or the plan to kill. They thought their act completely justified.

וַיֵּשֶׁב וַיְהַרְגֵהוּ וַיַּשְׁלִכֵהוּ בְּאֶחָד הַבְּרוֹת
 לִזְכָּא-כב וְאָמְרָנוּ חֵיהָ רָעָה אֲכָלְתָּהּ וַנִּרְאָהּ מֵה-
 כא יְהוָה חֲלֹמֵתִיו: וַיִּשְׁמַע רְאוּבֵן וַיַּצְלֵהוּ
 כב מִיָּדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא נִכְנָנוּ נַפְשׁ: וַיֹּאמֶר

sense of 'fabricator' — of his dreams; the dreams did not *come* to him, he invented them.

The word הָלַךְ is synonymous with הָיָה, *this*. The former expression is used when speaking of someone at a distance, as in our case and the case of Isaac in 24:65; when someone is *near*, as in *Esther* 7:6, הָיָה, *this*, is used (*Rashbam* to 24:65).

20. וְעַתָּה לָכֵן וַיְהַרְגֵהוּ — *So, now, come [idiomatic; lit. go] and let us kill him.*

Now — before he rises to power over us (*Malbim*).

As noted above, they reasoned that killing him to prevent the coordination of his misdeeds against them was an act of self-defense (*Sforno*).

The term לָכֵן, *go* [here rendered: *come*] has the idiomatic connotation of inviting comrades to participate in an act. Similarly in v. 27: *come* [לָכֵן] *let us sell him to the Ishmaelites*. Compare the analogous expression [Exodus 1:10]: הָבָה נִתְחַבֵּק: *come, let us deal shrewdly* (*Rashbam*).

וַיַּשְׁלִכֵהוּ בְּאֶחָד הַבְּרוֹת — *And [we will] throw him into one of the pits.*

— And he will not even get a proper burial! (*Oznaim LaTorah*).

[The brothers were not specific about which pit into which to throw him; Reuben, however, was more specific in his suggestion in v. 22. See *Oznaim LaTorah* cited there s.v. הַשְׁלִיכוּ אוֹתוֹ.]

וְאָמְרָנוּ חֵיהָ רָעָה אֲכָלְתָּהּ — *And we will say 'A wild beast devoured him.'*

— To project the blame away from ourselves and thereby prevent the possibility of Father cursing us (*Sforno*).

Since, as the story unfolds, they planned to bring his bloody tunic to Jacob as proof that he was dead, they had to devise this story to account for his death. Had a robber rather than a beast slain Joseph, he would certainly have taken the fine woolen tunic! (*Abarbanel*).

וַנִּרְאָהּ מֵהַיְיָו חֲלֹמֵתִיו — *Then we shall see what will become of his dreams [lit. and we will see what his dreams will be.]*

Rashi cites the Midrashic interpretation offered in *Bereishis Rabbah* by Rav Yitzchak [who does not understand these words as rhetoric of the conspiring brothers]:

— It is [not Joseph's brothers but] the Holy Spirit that interjects and says the latter part of this sentence. 'You say, *Let us slay him*, but I say, *Then we shall see what will become of his dreams* — i.e. then we will see whose will shall prevail, yours or Mine.' It is impossible that the brothers should have said these words [and use his dreams as a criteria], for as soon as they would kill him his dreams would *obviously* be ineffective!

Of course, the brothers did not hear this Divine pronouncement or else they would never have proceeded to do what they did. [Cf. *וַיִּשְׁמַע רְאוּבֵן* next verse] (*Alshich*).

Ramban cites this *Midrash*, but maintains that in the *literal* sense the remark was said by the brothers and intended derisively: *Then we shall see what will become of his dreams!* Or they reasoned that their plan would be a test: If he is rescued from our hands [it will prove his dreams were prophetic] and we will

37 ing! ²⁰ So, now, come and let us kill him, and throw
20-21 him into one of the pits; and we will say, "A wild
 beast devoured him." Then we shall see what will
 become of his dreams.'

²¹ Reuben heard, and he rescued him from their
 hand. He said, 'We will not strike him mortally!'

indeed see the fulfillment of his dreams
 — for he will then reign over us.

Let us kill him ... for if the plan to kill
 him succeeds, it will be obvious that his
 dreams of ruling over us were nothing
 but lies (*Sforzo*).

21. Reuben reacts.

וַיִּשְׁמַע רְעֻבֵן וַיִּצְלָהוּ מִיָּדָם — [And]
 Reuben heard, and he rescued him
 from their hand.

— Although Joseph's ordeal was
 far from over, Reuben is praised in
 past tense: *and he rescued him from
 their hand* as if the rescue were a
fait accompli and he was already
 successful in having delivered him
 (*Akeidas Yitzchak*). [See *Malbim*
 below and *Ramban* to v. 26 s.v.
 בְּכִי נִהְרָג].^[1]

He took the initiative here be-
 cause he reasoned that as the oldest
 he alone would be held responsible
 for the crime (*Midrash*; see *Rashi* v.
 22 s.v. לְמַעַן הָצִיל and *comm.* to v.
 30).

Although of all the brothers
 Reuben was the most injured by
 Joseph inasmuch as Joseph was to
 assume some of Reuben's rights as
 first born [see 35:22 and *I Chron.*
 5:1], nevertheless he was opposed
 to his brothers taking the law into
 their own hands. Still, he could not
 protect Joseph openly so he used
 the subterfuge of suggesting a
 'cleaner' way of putting their

brother to death in the hope, as we
 see below, that he would be able to
 save him (*Daas Soferim*).

The expression *Reuben heard* would
 seem to imply that Reuben had
 been with them just by chance as he
 must have soon left and was not present
 at the actual development of the drama.
 Whether as firstborn he did not have to
 take part in the ordinary daily work, or
 whether in general he differed from
 their ideas about Joseph and therefore
 took no part in the plans regarding him,
 is doubtful. We shall come back to this
 question again in v. 30 (*R' Hirsch*).

According to the *Midrash*, it had
 been Reuben's turn to attend his father.
 He had been on the way to care for
 Jacob when his brothers conspired
 against Joseph. Thus the verse tells us
 that *when Reuben heard* of their plan he
 rushed back and was determined to stop
 them.

Alshich suggests that of all the
 brothers it was only Reuben who *heard*
 the Divine pronouncement cited by
Rashi in the previous verse: 'We shall
 see whose will shall prevail — yours or
 Mine.' Reuben took this as a personal
 charge to thwart the plan.

The Sages [*Makkos* 10a] note that when
 the Cities of Refuge are listed in *Deut.* 4:43,
 the one in the territory of Reuben was
 privileged to be mentioned first 'because it
 was Reuben who spoke first in delivering
 [Joseph out of the pit]' (see *Torah Temimah*).

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא נִכְבֹּד נַפְשׁ — [And] he said,
 'We will not strike him mortally.'

— I, as the oldest brother, will not

1. The Sages observe that we learn from this incident [where we find that though Reuben's intentions of saving were good they went unfulfilled] that when a man performs a *mitzvah* he must carry it out joyously and completely (and not only partially).

'For,' said *R' Yitzchak*, 'had Reuben known that the Torah was recording for eternity these

וַיֹּשֶׁב לֹא כֹג
 אֲלֵהֶם | רְאוּבֵן אֶל-תִּשְׁכּוּרֵם הַשְּׁלִיכוּ
 אֹתוֹ אֶל-הַבּוֹר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְבָּר וְיָר
 אֶל-תִּשְׁלַחוּבּוֹ לְמַעַן הַצִּיל אֹתוֹ מִיָּדָם
 לְהַשִּׁיבּוֹ אֶל-אָבִיו: וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר-בָּא יוֹסֵף

tolerate that (*R' Hirsch*).

Reuben tried — as noted earlier in the verse — to save Joseph from *any* harm by them, but his efforts were unsuccessful. He now attempted at least to prevent them from perpetrating an act of wanton *murder* against him, by suggesting that they punish him in some other way (*Abarbanel; Malbim*).

[It is also possible that this verse is informing us that Reuben had *resolved* to save Joseph by determining to himself that they would not murder their brother. Only in the following verse did he actually *verbalize* his determination to his brothers. Therefore it does not say here *וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם*, he said to *them* but merely *he said*, i.e., resolved. Only in the next verse did he *verbalize* his intention *אֲלֵהֶם*, to *them*.]

[*Hoffmann* interprets similarly. This differs from *Ramban* next verse who maintains that the double *וַיֹּאמֶר*, *he said*, here and in v. 22, implies that after Reuben made this pronouncement much discussion ensued — not recorded by the Torah but evident from 42:22. Hence the second *וַיֹּאמֶר* in v. 22 to indicate there was a lapse in the unrecorded conversation. Our interpretation would assume that this unrecorded conversation took place within the parameters of v. 22, i.e., after he actually said to them 'shed no blood'.]

The Hebrew reads: *We will not strike his soul*. The translation follows *Rashi* who explains that the phrase is elliptic and means *We will not strike him נַפְשׁוֹ a striking of the soul, i.e. mortally*.

22. וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם רְאוּבֵן — *And Reuben said to them.*

verses about his attempted rescue of Joseph, he would have carried Joseph on his shoulders and brought him back to his father [instead of allowing him to be cast into the pit].

Similarly, the Sages observe: Had Boaz known that Scripture was recording of him that he was taking the trouble to provide food for Ruth, instead of giving her only *parched grain* [*Ruth* 2:14], he would have fed her fatted calves (*Vayikra Rabbah* 34:8).

Apparently there was much discussion on the matter as evidenced by Reuben's later recrimination [cf. 42:22] when he accused his brothers of not listening to him when he tried to deter them from harming Joseph. When his arguments failed, he *was* successful with the following proposal. The Torah records only *this* argument because it yielded positive results (*Ramban*).

אֶל-תִּשְׁכּוּרֵם — *Shed no blood!*

Reuben made as general a pronouncement as possible. He did not say, 'do not shed *his* blood' — rather his point was that they should not shed *any* blood, that they should not stoop to the crime of murder. He wanted to sound dispassionate, and not want it to appear that he had any special love for Joseph (*Ramban*).

If you want to rid yourselves of him there is a 'clean' way whereby you don't have to *personally* commit murder (*Hoffmann*)...

הַשְּׁלִיכוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל-הַבּוֹר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְבָּר — *Throw him into this pit [which is] in the wilderness.*

I.e., 'shed no blood, for he does not deserve death. If he has pained you with his dreams and taunts, then make him suffer by throwing him in a pit; but lay no hand on him to kill him.' This, too, was suggested only as a deterrent (*Radak*).

The pit is deep and he will not be

37 ²² And Reuben said to them: 'Shed no blood! Throw
22 him into this pit in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him!' — intending to rescue him from their hand, to return him to his father.

able to escape. Moreover, it is in the wilderness — his cries for help will go unheard for there will be no passersby to rescue him (*Ramban*).

Thus he will die without your committing murder (*Rashbam*).

The brothers planned to throw Joseph *בְּאֶחָד הַבְּרוֹת*, into one of the pits [v. 20] — without distinction as to which one, since any pit would serve their morbid purpose. However, since Reuben's purpose was not murder but to save Joseph, he carefully specified a particular pit — one which, as we shall see, had no water (*Oznaim LaTorah*).

וְיָד אֶל-תִּשְׁלָחוּ בוֹ — But lay no hand on him [lit. and a hand do not send forth in him].

— 'I would have been tolerant had you tried to kill him by intrigue — through others — because I, too, hate him. But far be it from you to kill him with your own hands!' This was another of Reuben's arguments. He was teaching them that the punishment for one who indirectly causes death is less than that of one who kills [for the former is punished only by the hands of Heaven, not by human courts. Cf. *Sanhedrin* 77a] (*Ramban*).

A similar expression occurs in 22:12 ... *וְאַל תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֵלָיו*, Do not stretch out your hand to ... (*Hoffmann*).

לְמַעַן הַצִּיל אוֹתוֹ מִיָּדָם לְהַשִּׁיבוֹ אֶל-אָבִיו — Intending [lit. in order] to rescue him [Joseph] from their hand, to return him to his father.

The Divine Spirit [i.e. Scripture

(*Rashbam*)] thus bears witness that Reuben advised his brothers to cast him into a pit only to rescue him, his intention being to return later and pull him out. As the eldest son, and their leader, he knew he would be held responsible (*Rashi*).¹¹

That Reuben's suggestion to cast Joseph into a pit was intended to save Joseph's life is predicated on the assumption that Reuben thought the pit contained neither serpents nor scorpions. Had he known that (as *Rashi* comments in v. 24) the pit was infested, Reuben would not have been saving him by his suggestion since, as noted in *Yevamos* 121a, one who has fallen into a snake pit is assumed to have died. Moreover, had the brothers seen Joseph survive such an ordeal they never would have sold him; they would have considered his survival as miraculous as Abraham's safe departure from the furnace of Ur Kasdim or Daniel's escape from the lions' pit. They would then have certainly believed in the truthfulness of his dreams (*Mizrachi*).

Why does *Rashi* suggest that Reuben acted to save Joseph out of fear of being blamed rather than out of a spirit of righteousness and aversion to bloodshed?

— Reuben could not have acted out of love for the Torah makes it clear that the brothers hated him excessively (*Mizrachi*).

— In his final blessings to his sons, Jacob singled out Judah for praise as the one who desisted from the plan to kill Joseph [49:9]: If Reuben's intentions had been truly sincere, Jacob should have mentioned him as the one who planned to save Joseph even from slavery. We deduce, therefore, that Reuben's motive was selfish in part (*Sifsei Chachomim*).

1. From the fact that the Torah publicly acknowledges Reuben's noble intention in attempting to save Joseph, we deduce that it is proper to publicly acknowledge and record one who performs a mitzvah (*Rashba, Responsa* 981).

Similarly, *Rama* in *Yoreh Deah* 249:13 rules that one who donated an article for charity may inscribe his name upon it and the community may not protest it.

וַיִּשָּׁבּוּ אֶל-אָחִיו וַיִּפְשִׁיטוּ אֶת-יֹסֶף אֶת-כִּתְנֹתָו
 כִּי אֶת-כִּתְנֹת הַפָּסִים אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו: וַיִּקְהוּ
 וַיִּשְׁלְכוּ אֹתוֹ הַבֶּרֶה וְהַבּוֹר רַק אֵין בּוֹ

23. The brothers execute judgment.

וַיְהִי בְּאֶשֶׁר-בָּא יוֹסֵף אֶל אָחִיו — *And so it was, when Joseph came to his brothers.*

[For all of the above transpired before he reached them.]

Midrashically, Joseph's approach is mentioned — though we already know from v. 19 that he was coming — to inform us that his coming was noteworthy: he came with praises [either with self-praise about his own superiority, or with praise of his brothers, that is, in friendship (*Yafeh Toar*)].

וַיִּפְשִׁיטוּ אֶת יוֹסֵף אֶת כִּתְנֹתָו — *They stripped Joseph of his tunic.*

I.e., they stripped Joseph bare (Akeidah) of his tunic. — The word *כִּתְנֹת*, in Biblical Hebrew, refers to an undershirt (*Rashi*).

Ibn Ezra interprets *אֶת* [in the *הפעיל*, causative form, with the particle *אֶת* which indicates a transitive verb with an object] to imply that *they ordered Joseph to remove his own tunic by himself*.

Possibly they persuaded him to do so under some pretext. It was only *after* the tunic was removed that they revealed their sinister intentions by forcibly casting him into the pit (*Ralbag*).

וַיִּפְשִׁיטוּ אֶת יוֹסֵף אֶת-כִּתְנֹת הַפָּסִים אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו — *The fine woolen tunic which he had on* [lit. *which was upon it (or: him)*].

[In addition to stripping Joseph

of his undershirt, they also stripped him of] *the fine woolen tunic* — which his father had given him to wear as a second garment, one more than the single shirt worn by his brothers [v. 3] (*Rashi*).

Thus, they stripped him of the two garments he was wearing — an undershirt and the fine woolen tunic *אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו*, which was upon it [*the undershirt*], which he wore against his body to protect the fine woolen tunic from perspiration. The Torah does not connect these two tunics with the conjunction *וְ* (*and*), to intimate that in the brothers' anger they stripped him of both garments together (*Or Ha-Chaim*), also demonstrating to him thereby that it was not the tunic given him by their father that they were after (*Maharshah*; cf. *Mizrachi*).¹¹

According to *Abarbanel*, both tunics refer to the fine woolen tunic, the second phrase modifying the first: *they stripped Joseph of his tunic, which was the fine woolen tunic which he had on him*. It is understood that they did not leave him bare, however, since he probably was wearing some other shirt, [קלוק] beneath that tunic.

The fine woolen tunic is emphatically mentioned because it was this garment which had initially stirred up their envy. The mention also prepares us for the fact that they

1. The mention of Joseph's tunic [an undergarment] before his פסים, fine woolen tunic is apparently out of sequence since the woolen one was the outer garment which would have been removed first. What occurred was that in order not to antagonize his brothers, Joseph wore his outer fine woolen tunic — a prime source of their envy — beneath the tunic which he usually wore against his body. Thus, in effect they first removed his tunic and then his fine woolen tunic (*Meleches Machsheves*; *Kli Yakar*).

37 ²³ And so it was, when Joseph came to his brothers
23-24 they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the fine woolen
 tunic which he had on. ²⁴ Then they took him, and
 cast him into the pit. The pit was empty; no water
 was in it.

later dipped it in blood and sent it back to Jacob as proof that Joseph was dead [v. 31ff] (*Rashbam*).

24. וַיִּקְחוּהוּ וַיְשַׁלְּכוּהוּ אֶתוֹ הַבְּרָכָה —
 Then they took him, and cast him
 into the pit.

[The Hebrew verb *took* always implies physical or persuasive force.]

From the brothers' later recriminations recalling that when they had thrown Jacob into the pit '*we looked at his anguish yet paid no heed when he pleaded with us*' [42:21], we know that Joseph pleaded and prostrated himself before them. He seems not to have offered physical resistance [since he was hopelessly outnumbered], but only *said* whatever was possible to save himself. However, they were callous to his entreaties (*Radak*).

Ramban comments there that the Torah did not mention his entreaties in our narrative either because it is self-evident that there would be a struggle and entreaties in such a situation; or because the Torah wanted to gloss over as many details of their sin as possible; or because it is characteristic for the Torah to economize on details of a matter in one place and elaborate on them in another.

The Torah is written unvowelized allowing for exegical interpretations beyond the obvious meaning of the text. The word וַיִּקְחוּהוּ, *they took him*, is spelled ויקחוהוּ. As it is spelled, it can also be read as ויקחוהוּ, and he took him. This alludes to the fact that it was primarily one of the brothers — acting on behalf of all the others — who took and cast him into the pit. It was Simeon. He was later punished when Joseph singled him out for detention in 42:24 (*Midrash*).

[And] the pit was empty; no water was in it.

— Why the repetition? Since it states that *the pit was empty*, isn't it obvious that *no water was in it*? — The redundancy intimates: there was no water in it but there were serpents and scorpions in it (*Rashi* from *Shabbos* 22a).

I.e., the added phrase *there was no water in it* implies that the emptiness was not total; the pit was empty only of water, as well as shrubbery, stones, and the like, but not of serpents and scorpions which constantly crawl in and out of crevices. Although they are intermittently present, such a pit can be called 'empty' in this qualified sense. This too appears to be based on the Rabbinic exegesis found in *Sanhedrin* 15a אין מיעוט אחר, 'one exclusion [in our case: the pit was empty] following another exclusion [in our case: there was no water in it] does not imply a limitation but an extension [that is, the first limitation is not total, but is circumscribed by the second one]. In our case, the emptiness of the pit did not include a lack of serpents and scorpions in it (cf. *Mizrachi*, *Sefer Zikaron*).

That this rabbinic exegesis indicates only the presence of serpents and scorpions, rather than other dangerous creatures, is understood by the commentators to be a *gezerah shavah*, teaching derived from a similarity of the phrases. Our verse has אין בו מים, *there is no water in it*; a similar phrase which occurs in *Deut.* 8:15 where the passage reads: ... serpents and scorpions a parched land אין בו מים, *which has no water*. Just as there the phrase is used in a situation where there were serpents and scorpions, in our case, too, the pit was waterless but it contained serpents and scorpions.

Ramban maintains that in the literal sense, the Torah accentuates that they had no intention of drowning him in the pit. Had it contained water they would not have cast him into it, for Joseph would have drowned and it would have

וישב לו כה מים: וישבו לאכל לחם וישאו עיניהם ויראו והנה ארחת שמעאלים באה

been regarded as the direct murder which they wished to avoid. If so, the intent is that the pit was completely empty.

Ramban maintains that according to the Rabbinic interpretation advanced by Rashi, the poisonous creatures must have been hidden in the deep crevices of the pit. Had the brothers seen that the pit was infested with deadly reptiles, they would have realized that only Joseph's righteousness could account for the miracle of his survival in the pit. Knowing that, they would have saved him from all harm and vindicated him in their eyes.

The consensus of commentators similarly agrees that Reuben, too, was unaware that the pit was infested. Since he meant to deter them from killing Joseph, he certainly could not have hoped to rescue him and bring him back to his father by casting him into mortal danger in an infested pit! Moreover [as noted by Ramban], the brothers would never have sold Joseph had they seen Joseph miraculously survive in an infested pit. Even

the evil Nebuchadnezzar was moved to repentance when he saw Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah survive the fiery furnace; surely the righteous sons of Jacob! ...

Torah Temimah notes the Rabbinic dictum that the term *השליך*, *casting*, is used only to denote throwing from a height of at least twenty cubits. [See *comm.* to *Tamid* 28b]. Accordingly, the use of the verb *cast* in our verse implies that Joseph's pit was twenty cubits deep. This would explain why the brothers were unaware that poisonous creatures were in the pit; they could not see clearly to such a depth. For, as the Sages explain in connection with a Chanukah menorah or סוכך, *succah* covering, they may not be placed at a height of over twenty cubits because they would not be seen clearly from below (*Shabbos* 22a).^[1]

25. וישבו לאכל לחם — [And] they sat to eat food [lit. bread].^[2]

— At a distance from the pit, so as not to eat brazenly at the scene of potential bloodshed (*Rashbam* v. 28).

The expression וישאו עיניהם, *they*

1. The *Zohar*, however, assumes that Reuben was aware that the pit was infested. How then, the *Zohar* asks, could Reuben have advised casting Joseph into the pit — was he not concerned about the fatal bites of the deadly creatures?

The answer offered is that Reuben was quite aware of the intense enmity which his brothers — led by Simeon and Levi — felt for Joseph. He reasoned that if an entire city could not escape these two brothers at Shechem, then if Joseph should fall into their hands they would not leave any evidence: not a single trace of his corpse would remain to provide Jacob at least the consolation of burial. Reuben therefore decided it was preferable to cast him into a reptile-infested pit than to let him fall into the hands of avowed, ruthless enemies.

The rationale is that if one is deserving, God may perform a miracle to save him from beasts. But Providence will very rarely interfere with man's exercise of his Free Will, even when they seek to harm their enemies. That would require a much greater miracle.

This is the intent of the phrase: *Intending to rescue Joseph from their hand to return him to his father*. Reuben's primary aim was to keep Joseph away from Simeon and Levi's ruthless clutches, opting to expose him to vicious reptiles as the lesser of the evils, so at the very worst — even if Providence did not interfere and save Joseph — at least there was glimmer of a chance that his corpse could possibly be returned to Jacob for burial.

R' Munk concludes that Reuben was hoping for divine mercy, like King David when he said to the prophet Gad [II Samuel 24:14]: *Let us fall into the hands of HASHEM for His compassion is great, but let me not fall into the hand of men.*

2. As they were casting him into the pit they said, 'Let us eat and drink and then we shall raise him up and slay him.'

After they ate and drank and were about to say the Grace After Meals, Judah said to them: 'We are about to slay and yet we would say Grace to the Holy One, Blessed be He! We are nothing but blasphemers!'

This was Judah's intent in exclaiming [v. 26] ... מה, בצע, 'What! An act of plunder [or

37 25 They sat to eat food. Raising their eyes they saw,
25 behold! — a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from

looked up [lit. lifted up their eyes] never intimates a casual looking around, but always an intentional one. Throughout their meal, they felt uneasy. They kept looking toward the pit (R' Hirsch).

That the brothers were able to sit down to a meal while the piercing cries of their doomed brother were still ringing in their ears proves that they had a clear conscience. They considered themselves wholly justified to have acted in self-defense [see on v. 20 above] (*Sforno*).

Midrashically, too, the Sages perceive how the Providential effects of their sinister action were ultimately favorable and for the benefit of mankind: In sitting down to eat and planning to sell Joseph, the tribal ancestors ultimately benefited the entire world. For Joseph was sold into Egypt to provide sustenance to the entire world during the years of famine. Accordingly, the passage they sat down to eat food should be understood retrospectively: they made it possible for the entire world to eat bread (*Pesikta Rabbosi* 40:31).

Nevertheless, in the Upper Realms, though God is long-suffering, no sin is overlooked. He eventually exacts punishment. 'You sold your brother, then sat down to eat,' the Holy One, Blessed be He, said of the Tribal Ancestors. 'There will yet come a time that your descendants will be sold in the midst of a feast!' And so it was many centuries later in Shushan, when the King and Haman sat

down to drink [Esther 3:15], that the extermination of the Jews was plotted. R' Yissachar observed that this eventual retribution hung over them although Joseph forgave them [45:8]; how much more so when one does not forgive! (*Midrash Tehillim* 10).

It appears from v. 29: *And Reuben returned*, that Reuben was not present throughout this time. [Thus a total of nine brothers sat down to eat; Joseph and Benjamin were also not present (*Ibn Ezra*).] According to the *Midrash* cited by *Rashi* in v. 29, Reuben was not present since it was his day to look after Jacob. According to another Midrashic interpretation: [Reuben did not dine nor otherwise associate with them on mundane matters] since he was occupied with his sackcloth and fasting in penitence for his having disturbed his father's couch [see 35:22].

B'chor Shor is sensitive to the difficulty of suggesting that Reuben had gone the long distance from Dothan to Hebron to look after his father for one day. He comments that Reuben was not present because shepherds cannot all sit together to eat; some must be available to look after the flocks while the others eat. Thus, Judah was eating with some of the brothers while Reuben was tending the sheep with the rest. This was why Reuben was not present, and Judah suggested the sale in his absence.

אֲרֵחָת יִשְׁמָעֵאִלִים בָּאָה מִגִּלְעָד — A caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead.

From the appearance of the camels, they recognized the caravan to be Ishmaelite. Since it was com-

employing the other meaning of *בָּעַץ*, the technical term for *break bread*: What! Shall there be breaking of bread] and Grace if we then slay our brother! He alluded to the verse in *Psalms* 10:3: וְיֹשֵׁעַ בְּרַךְ נֹאֵץ ה' [Midrashically rendered: He who despoils and then says Grace, blasphemes HASHEM] — He therefore went on to say, Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites (*Pesikta Rabbosi* 10:13. See footnote next verse where this exegesis is explained in more detail).

וַיֵּשֶׁב לְזָכוֹ כֹּה
 מִגִּלְעָד וּגְמֻלֵיהֶם נִשְׂאִים נִכְאֹת וְצָרִי
 כֹּה וְלֹט הוֹלְכִים לְהוֹרִיד מִצְרֵימָה: וַיֹּאמֶר
 יְהוֹדָה אֶל-אָחִיו מִה-בָּצַע בִּי נְהַרְגֵנּוּ
 כֹּה אָחִינוּ וְכִסְיֵנוּ אֶת-דָּמֹנוּ: לָכֵן וְנִמְכְּרֵנוּ

ing from Gilead, a source of spices, they surmised that it was plying the trade route, bringing spices to Egypt (*Ramban*).

[On Gilead see 31:21-25.]

According to the implication of *Rashi* [see below] this description of the caravan's load was *not* assumed by the brothers; instead, Scripture gives us these facts. The brothers could not have known what the camels were carrying until the caravan drew near. From the mere knowledge that the merchants were Ishmaelites, the brothers originally assumed that they carried their *usual* wares, evil-smelling commodities like naphtha.

A caravan is termed *אָרָה* in Hebrew, referring as it does to *הוֹלְכֵי אֹרָה*, *wayfarers* [lit. 'travelers of the road'] (*Rashi*).

It has been noted that in the clear air of Eretz Yisrael, such a caravan could be discerned several miles away. It could take several hours before it reached the brothers (*Hoffmann*).

[And] *their camels [were] bearing spicery.*

The Torah informs us of their load to emphasize how Providence arranges for the reward of the righteous: Arabs generally traded in naphtha and tar which have a foul odor, but on this occasion it was providentially arranged that they carry fragrant spicery so that Joseph would be spared from enduring an offensive odor (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).

Also, spicery is carried in small vials and there would be room for

Joseph to ride on the camels. Had the camels been loaded with bulkier commodities, Joseph would have been forced to make the long journey on foot (*Haamek Davar*).

The translation of נִכְאֹת as a collective term for spicery follows *Rashi* who cites *II Kings* 20:13 where the cognate term בֵּית נִכְתָּה refers to the house where spices were mixed [i.e., a perfumery]. *Onkelos* renders it as a kind of wax [probably an aromatic gum], while *Ibn Janach* [*Shorashim* s.v. נִכָּה] explains it as referring to the essence of the carob tree. Interestingly, further in 43:11 *Rashi*, too, renders the term in that context as meaning wax.

וְצָרִי — [*And*] *balsam*.

— I.e., the fragrant resin [= balm] that exudes from the wood of the balsam tree (*Rashi*; see *Shabbos* 26a and *Kerisos* 6a where this balm is listed as one of the ingredients of the compound of קְטֹרֶת, *incense*).

In *Jeremiah* 8:22 and 46:11 it is intimated that this was a product of Gilead (*Hoffmann*).

וְלֹט — *And Lotus*.

This translation follows *Rashi* who cites the analogous Mishnaic term לוֹטִיָּא [see *Sheviis* 7:6]. He notes that the Sages explain it as a vegetable root which bears the name *aristolochia* [= birthwort]; cf. *Niddah* 8a (*Rashi*).

In the *Midrash*, the term is rendered as מְסֻטִּיבִי, *gum mastic*, while others render it as *labdanum*, a fragrant gum of rockroses of the *Cistus* genus, used in the manufacture of perfume.

וְהוֹלְכִים לְהוֹרִיד מִצְרֵימָה — *On their way to bring [them] down to Egypt.*

While the caravan was still at a

37 Gilead, their camels bearing spicery, balsam, and
26-27 lotus — on their way to bring them down to Egypt.
 26 Judah said to his brothers, 'What gain will there be
 if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?' 27 Come

distance, the brothers surmised that it was headed toward Egypt, that being the usual destination of spices from Gilead (Ramban).

[As noted in the *comm.* to v. 18, the plain north and west of Dothan was crossed by the trade route from Gilead past Beth Shean and Jezreel, on through the Sharon Valley, and Lydda to Egypt.]

We find that Jacob later sent a gift of such spices to Joseph [see 43:11]; apparently these were considered precious in Egypt where these resins would be used medicinally, as incense, and in embalming (Abarbanel; Malbim).

26. Judah's proposal.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה אֶל אָחָיו — Then [lit. and] Judah said to his brothers.

Judah is named because he was responsible for the decision that saved Joseph's life, just as Reuben was named [v. 21-22] because he initiated Joseph's salvation. However, the Torah concealed the identity of the brothers who conspired against Joseph and delicately referred to them only as אִישׁ אֶל אָחָיו, one to another (Oznaim LaTorah following Midrash).

מָה בָּצֵעַ — What gain [will there be].

[This is an idiomatic expression meaning: what benefit could we possibly derive ...?] Literally, as Onkelos renders it: What moneys will we have (Rashi).¹¹

This interpretation is based on the fact that the verb בצע as used in Scripture contextually refers to greed, avariciousness, unjust gain cf. Exod. 18:21 (Ibn Janach; Heidenheim).

HaKsav V'HaKabbalah relates it to the verb בצע in Lamentations 2:17 where it has the sense of execute judgment. 'Is this the right way to execute judgment against Joseph for his misdeed?' Judah then went on to show how this course of action was undesirable.

Midrashically, Pesikta Rabbasi [cited in the footnote to v. 25] interprets בצע as the technical term for breaking bread: What! Shall there be a breaking of bread [i.e. shall you sit down to dine] when we are about to kill our brother!

כִּי נִהְרֵג אֶת־אָחִינוּ וְכִסִּינוּ אֶת־דָּמּוֹ — If we kill our brother and [we] cover up his blood?

The commentators differ on the connotation of his argument:

— Ramban: In convincing them that by throwing Joseph into the pit

1. [Rashi's explanation of Judah's suggestion as a mercenary one: what monetary gain could we reap by killing Joseph, seems to follow the Talmudic interpretation in Sanhedrin 6a.

In expounding upon the verse in Psalms 10:3 וּבָצַע בָּרֵךְ נֹאֶךְ ה' [lit. he who blesses one who is avaricious has blasphemed HASHEM,] the Sages explain this as a derogatory reference to Judah and proclaim: לְכִימְכֹרֶךְ אֶת־יְהוּדָה וְשֹׁמֵר „מִהַבָּע כִּי נִהְרֵג אֶת־אָחִינוּ” כִּי זֶה מִנְאָץ, וְעַל זֶה: נֹאֶךְ ה', וּבָצַע בָּרֵךְ נֹאֶךְ ה' " has will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?" is but a blasphemer, as it is written 'He who praises the one who is avaricious (בָּצֵעַ) blasphemed H ASHEM.

The intent of this exposition is that since Judah's advice was heeded by his brothers, he should have insisted that they return him to Jacob, rather than suggesting that they sell him.

Maharsha explains the intent to be: Whoever praises Judah for having suggested that money be a consideration in determining Joseph's fate, thereby blasphemes HASHEM since Judah should have invoked fear of committing murder as a deterrent, not considerations of profit.

Alternatively, Maharsha offers that since Judah's advice did result in Joseph's being spared, the Talmud might have meant an opposite interpretation. This is based on the frequent prac-

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים וַיְנַדְנוּ אֶל-תְּהִיבוֹ כִּי-אָחִינוּ
כֹּחַ בְּשָׂרֵנוּ הוּא וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אָחִיו: וַיַּעֲבְרוּ
לִזְכָּח

they would not be guilty of murder [see *comm.* to v. 22], Reuben had already persuaded the brothers not to kill Joseph. Now Judah said: 'Surely even by sending him to his death in this *indirect* way we will be considered murderers, and we will have thereby covered his blood (see below) like common killers.'

Ramban continues that one who causes murder is indeed considered a murderer. This is evidenced in *II Sam.* 12:9 where the prophet Nathan accused King David of murdering Uriah though David had only ordered Uriah placed in a situation that resulted in his death. The only difference between the two forms of murder is that the punishment is greater for one who *personally* murders than for one who *indirectly* causes death [for as noted above in v. 22, the latter is

punished only by the hands of Heaven and not by human courts]. Thus both Reuben and Judah were correct.

Sforno: What benefit will accrue from killing him? If we seek the satisfaction of revenge, the deed will recoil on our own heads since we will come to grieve over our brutality. If, however, we intend the killing as a warning to other potential enemies, that cannot be achieved since we will have to conceal his blood and none will know. [Similarly, *Abarbanel* and *Malbim*.]

... We will not even have the satisfaction of boasting about our revenge since we will have to hide our act from Father. Human nature is such that revenge is not truly sweet unless one can boast of it (*Chizkuni*).

— *R' Hirsch*: How would the death of our brother serve our pur-

tice of Scripture and the Sages to use a euphemism in place of particularly unpleasant word. Thus a blind person is called *קוֹי נָרוֹר*, one with much light or enhanced vision. Similarly, instead of *קלל*, curse, the Sages frequently substitute the euphemistic expression *ברך*, bless. In connection with Judah, the Sages would be saying: Whoever curses (מְכַרֵּךְ) lit. *blesse*s = a euphemism for *קלל*, curses] Judah for using absence of profit as the reason for not killing Joseph, thereby blasphemes HASHEM since Judah's motive was entirely for the sake of Heaven. He felt that his brothers would not listen to him had he suggested that they release Joseph for a pure motive. He therefore advanced the suggestion that they rid themselves of Joseph by selling him; it was his only hope of sparing Joseph's life. This is termed 'blasphemy to HASHEM' because the Hebrew name יהודה [Yehudah], Judah, contains all the letters of HASHEM's Four-Letter-name, with the addition of a ד, *dalet* [see *Overview* to *Ruth*].

See also *Torah Temimah* who supports this interpretation inasmuch as Jacob, in the blessings before his death, also praised Judah's efforts [but cf. *Tosafos* ad. loc. sv. אֶלָּא and footnote to previous verse.]

In *Midrash Rabbah* cited in the *comm.*, the implication is also that in recording Judah's suggestion the Torah praises him. It should not be thought that Judah was mercenary, for he saw no other way of saving him.

[Comp. *Mechilta Beshallah* #5, however, where Judah is praised only moderately for his feeble but sincere efforts — he should have taken a firmer stand and advised that they restore him to Jacob. See also *Sotah* 13 (cited in footnote to 38:7 and *comm.* to 38:11) where Judah is criticized for abandoning his good deed of trying to rescue Joseph, leaving it unfinished. One who leaves a good deed uncompleted, the Sages teach, will eventually bury his wife and children, as indeed happened to Judah. (Reuben is not castigated in this way since he *had*, in fact saved Joseph from murder by his brothers. That they sold Joseph before Reuben could rescue him from the pit and return him to Jacob was no fault of Reuben).]

37 let us sell him to the Ishmaelites — but let our hand
27 not be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.' His brothers agreed.

pose better than sending him far away from us?

It is noted that Judah's apprehension was not based on knowledge that the pit contained snakes and scorpions, but on the fear that Joseph would die of thirst and hunger (Mizrachi to v. 22 s.v. רוח הקדש).

[Thus, Judah directed his appeal not to emotion but to reason: Leaving Joseph in the pit also means to kill him.]

וְכִסּוּ אֶת־דָּמוֹ — And [we] cover up his blood.

— Figuratively: Conceal the fact of his death (Rashi; Radak and most commentators).

Rashi pursues a figurative interpretation since, in the literal sense, no blood had been spilled (Mizrachi).

Ramban interprets the phrase in its literal sense since murderers generally do away with their victim by burying the corpse and 'concealing his blood.' In this case, the inference was that by letting Joseph languish and die in the pit, they would in effect be murdering him and covering his blood with dust.

HaKsav V'HaKabbalah interprets this in the figurative sense: '... And garb ourselves with [the moral stain of having shed] his blood.'

27. וְנִמְכְּרֵנוּ לְיִשְׁמָעֵאֵלִים — Come [idiomatic; lit. go] let us sell him to the Ishmaelites.

— They are traveling to a distant country; the matter will never be discovered (Ramban, v. 25).

— By selling him, we will be punishing him measure for measure: He wished to become our

master, now he will be a slave (Sforzo).

וְנִדְּנוּ אֶל־תְּהִיבוֹ כִּי אָחִינוּ בְּשָׂרֵנוּ הוּא — But [lit. and] let our hand not be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.

But let our hand not be upon him. Even though he will die in the pit, and our involvement in it will be only indirect, nevertheless we will have been instrumental in his death. Let our hand not have even that involvement — if we sell him he will not die (Radak).

He is our brother from one father, and our flesh inasmuch as our mothers were sisters and it is the mother who supplies the flesh [Niddah 31a] (Haamek Davar).

[Comp. Laban's remark to Jacob (29:14): You are my flesh and bones. Cf. also Meshech Chochmah and Maharsha Niddah ad.loc.]

[On the expression flesh denoting one familial entity, cf. also on 2:24 וְהָיוּ אֶחָד לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד, And they shall become one flesh.]

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אָחָיו — [And] his brothers agreed.

The brothers reasoned: It has already been decreed at the Covenant Between the Parts (15:13) that the descendants of our ancestor Abraham are to be enslaved. We are all his descendants. If we sell Joseph as a slave, perhaps the decree will be fulfilled in him alone (Chizkuni).

The translation of וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ [lit. ...heard] as agreed [in the sense of heeded] follows Rashi who notes that whenever the verb שמע has the contextual sense of heeding, agreeing with or obeying, Onkelos uses the Aramaic root קבל. Examples are our verse; 28:7: And Jacob obeyed his father; Exod. 24:7:

אֲנָשִׁים מְדִינִים סָחְרִים וַיִּמְשְׁכוּ וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִן־הַבּוֹר וַיִּמְכְּרוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף

וישב
לזכח

וַיַּעֲשֵׂה וַיִּשְׁמַע: *We will do and we will obey* [cf. also 34:24]. — However, where the word literally means *hear* with the auditory sense, *Onkelos* employs the root *שמע*, *hear*, which is used in Aramaic as well as Hebrew. Examples are 3:8: *They heard the sound of HASHEM God manifesting Itself in the garden*; 27:5; 31:1; *Exod.* 16:12.

[*Rashi* pursues this interpretation since the Torah could not mean the obvious fact that the brothers *heard with their ears* what Judah had spoken.

28. וַיַּעֲבְרוּ אֲנָשִׁים מְדִינִים סָחְרִים — *Then* [lit. and] *Midianite men, traders, passed by.*

[The appearance of a Midianite caravan surprises us, as we have previously been informed only of an *Ishmaelite* caravan]:

This was another caravan. The Torah thus indicates that he was sold several times (*Rashi*) ...

וַיִּמְשְׁכוּ וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת יוֹסֵף מִן הַבּוֹר — [And] *they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites.*

They drew refers to the sons of Jacob — they took him out of the pit and sold him to the *Ishmaelites*; in turn, the *Ishmaelites* sold him to the *Midianites*, and the *Midianites* to the *Egyptians* (*Rashi*).

That the brothers, acting on Judah's advice, sold Joseph to the *Ishmaelites* is basic to *Rashi's* exegesis which is based on the Talmud and Midrash. Though the Torah does not explicitly mention that the *Ishmaelites* sold Joseph to the *Midianites*, *Rashi* relies on v. 36 which states that the *Medanites* [whom *Rashi* apparently identifies with their brother-clan the *Midianites*; see *comm.* there] *had sold Joseph to Egypt*. Obviously they had to have *purchased* Joseph before they had *sold* him (*Mizrachi*).

¶ Who sold Joseph?

— *The alternate views.*

This passage constitutes the turning point in the history of Joseph; it marks the descent of the Israelites into Egypt. The subject of the passage has been a matter of much controversy among the commentators. It should be noted that a reading of v. 28, in isolation, would strongly intimate that the *Midianites* were the ones who pulled Joseph from the pit and sold him.

Rashi, following the Talmudic exegesis, postulates that the subject of this latter passage — *they drew Joseph up ... and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites* — reverts to the brothers who are the subject of the previous verse and not to the *Midianites* who are the subject of the immediately preceding phrase. This identification is followed by many commentators. In fact, *Ramban* to 24:32 cites our passage as an example of a subject changing within the same verse, in this case from the *Midianites* to the sons of Jacob.

That Jacob's sons, the tribal ancestors, sold their brother is the basis of much Rabbinic exegesis, and its *Hashkafah* (philosophic) implications are discussed in the Overview to this *Sidrah* [see also footnote to v. 15]. In general, as *R' Bachya* notes, the later imperial decree against the Ten Martyrs who were slain during the Roman Persecutions was on account of the sin of the sale of Joseph by the ten brothers. [See *Midrash Mishlei* s.v. כל הון. The martyrs are generally identified as: *R' Shimon ben Gamliel*; *R' Yishmael the High Priest*; *R' Akiva*; *R' Yehudah ben Bava*; *R' Chaninah ben Teradion*; *R' Yeshovav the Scribe*; *R' Elazar ben Dama*; *R' Chaninah ben Chachinai*; *R' Chutzpis the Meturgeman* and *R' Elazar ben Shamua*.] It is unclear how we arrive at the total of ten brothers, since Reuben was not involved in the sale, and Benjamin, who was only about nine years old, had been at home during the

entire episode. However, R' Bachya includes Reuben in the number and maintains that by his participation in the *formulation* of the plot against Joseph, he shared responsibility for the sale as well.)

As we shall see, however, not all commentators agree that it was the brothers who lifted Joseph out of the pit and sold him, nor do they all agree with the identity of the caravans and the sequence of transferences by which Joseph eventually ended up in Egypt.

Among the various difficulties that inspire the various interpretations is the contextual flow of the narrative itself, and the surprise introduction of Midianite merchants in the midst of the account of the sale.

In v. 27 we are told that the brothers agreed to Judah's suggestion that they sell Joseph to the caravan of Ishmaelites. Then, in v. 28, in apparent compliance with this suggestion, we are told that *they* [=presumably the brothers] *drew Joseph up ... and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver*. However, prior to this narrative, previously unmentioned Midianite merchants are inexplicably introduced to us. Who were they and what was their role?

Rashi, as noted above, advances the Talmudic exegesis that the mention of the Midianite merchants at this point prepares us for v. 36 where they are implicitly recorded as Joseph's owners; thereby we are shown that a three-fold sale had taken place: The brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites, who sold him to the Midianites, who sold him to Potiphar in Egypt. [This is inferred from v. 36 which states the Midianites sold him; obviously, then, they must have bought him.]

[It appears that Rashi identifies the Midianites with their brother-tribe the Medanites mentioned in v. 36.]

The seemingly left unanswered question is what we are to make of 39:1

where Potiphar is described as having bought Joseph 'from the hand of the *Ishmaelites who brought him down there*.' Even Mizrachi, writes: 'I do not know what Rashi would make of that verse.'

The *Daas Zekeinim* basically share Rashi's view that the brothers sold Joseph. In reconciling some of the Scriptural difficulties, however, they differ drastically in the sequence of the sale and the identity of the various purchasers. According to them there were four sales, not three.

They postulate that the brothers had agreed to sell Joseph to the approaching Ishmaelite caravan. But while they were discussing the matter, a group of Midianite merchants passed by and the brothers sold Joseph to *them* while he was still in the pit. The Midianites hauled him out of the pit and in turn sold him to the Ishmaelites who had arrived in the interim. The Ishmaelites sold him to the Medanites who sold him to the Egyptians. That in 39:1 we are told that Potiphar bought him *from the hand of the Ishmaelites* is no contradiction. Potiphar's suspicions were aroused by Joseph's handsome and commanding appearance. He could not believe that the dark-skinned Medanites could have owned a 'white slave,' especially a white boy of such carriage and ability; usually the situation was reversed. The Ishmaelites were therefore brought to give their 'hand' — i.e., the necessary guarantee, that the Medanites were indeed the legitimate owners. This then is the force of 39:1: *Potiphar bought him from the hand* [i.e. as a result of the surety of the hand — the guarantee] *of the Ishmaelites* — though the Medanites were actually his owners.

Ramban follows Rashi's view that the brothers lifted Joseph out of the pit and sold him, but he proposes a different solution to the identity of the caravans and hence the nature of the sale.

He cites *Ibn Ezra* who maintains that

וישב לִישְׁמַעֲאֵלִים בְּעֶשְׂרִים כֶּסֶף וַיְבִיאוּ אֶת־

the Midianites are referred to by the designation Ishmaelites. [Radak in *Judges* 8:24 interprets similarly on the basis that Midian was the son of Keturah who is traditionally identified with Hagar, mother of Ishmael.]¹¹ Ramban disagrees with this identification on various contextual grounds and maintains that the Ishmaelites and Midianites were distinct peoples who together formed one caravan. For when the caravan, which had seemed from afar to be Ishmaelite, drew closer, they discovered that it was composed of Ishmaelite camel drivers who hired themselves and their camels to Midianite merchants — traders — but who were not themselves engaged in trade.

Thus, according to Ramban, the brothers planned to sell Joseph to Ishmaelites, but they actually sold him to Midianites.

Accordingly, the verse which states: *They sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites* implies that the Midianites purchasers turned him over to their Ishmaelite haulers who would transport him to Egypt. This is also the implication of the verse [39:1]: *from the hand of the Ishmaelites who brought him down there*, for Joseph was in their care — but the Midianites were his owners. This is the force of the verse: *And the Medanites [=Midianites] sold him to Egypt*.

Ramban proceeds to defend his exegesis by demonstrating that the Torah often employs this narrative method.

Sometimes it attributes a deed to its primary author, and at other times to the ultimate commissioner of the deed, or intermediary. Thus, *God* is sometimes credited with an act as in *Deut.* 11:7: *All the marvelous deeds that HASHEM performed in Egypt and in the Wilderness*; while at other times Moses is credited with the same deeds, as in (*ibid.* 34:12): *... that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel*. Similarly, Solomon is credited with the work in the Temple [*I Kings* 7:51] which was actually executed by Hiram [*ibid.* v. 14].

[Thus, following Ramban's thesis the Torah alternately refers to Joseph's captors as Ishmaelites and Midianites, because the Torah sometimes attributes a deed to its immediate cause, in our context the Midianites, and at others to its more indirect one, in our context the Ishmaelites.]

Sforno pursues a somewhat similar interpretation, maintaining however, that it was with the *Ishmaelites* — who were acting as intermediaries for the Midianites — that the brothers negotiated. The brothers did not wish to deal directly with the Midianites, who, as merchants, traveled to many towns and might recognize them at some later time. They did not have this apprehension about dealing with the *Ishmaelites* who, as caravan leaders, took circuitous routes. The Midianites were the actual purchasers, however. A parallel to this sale of a brother by brothers occurred during the wars with the Romans — especially during the period of tyrannical Hasmonians — when Jews sold their own kinfolk to the Romans.

1. *Ibn Ezra's* view that Midianites and Ishmaelites are designations for one people, is followed by many commentators — among them *Abarbanel* and *Ralbag* — *Ramban's* criticism notwithstanding.

Among its foremost proponents is *R' Yosef B'chor Schor*. He explains that the ancestors of the Midianites, Medanites and Ishmaelites were brothers — children of Abraham's concubines. Though the Torah refers to them interchangeably by different names, they are really one and the same, just as Jews are interchangeably called Jews, Hebrews, and Israelites. There is according to this view no discrepancy in the narrative.

Interestingly even *Rashi's* supercommentary, *Gur Aryeh*, subscribes to *Ibn Ezra's* interpretation. He maintains that the Torah refers to the Midianites as Ishmaelites since the latter were the primary clan [much as we would refer to Middle Eastern Semites by the common designation Arab]. From the way the Midianites were dressed, the brothers and Potiphar assumed them to be Ishmaelites, but the Torah informs us that they were really Midianites. Possibly it was a caravan composed of several peoples — including Midianites — and the whole of which was referred to by the general term Ishmaelite.

37 Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver.

Not all commentators, however, agree that the brothers sold Joseph. Based on the context of the verse which begins with the approach of the Midianites, these commentators maintain that the Midianites, not the brothers, drew Joseph out of the pit. Furthermore, according to this thesis, these Midianites sold him without the brothers' knowledge or consent.

One of the earliest proponents of this approach, which has its roots in *Tanchuma Yashan*, is *Rashbam*. [He is followed (with many important changes) by *Chizkuni*, *R'Bachya*, *R'Hirsch*, *Malbim* and *Netziv*. (The latter maintains however that the brothers observed how the Midianite — drawn to the pit by Joseph's cries — hauled him out and were joyous that their desired goal was being executed by others without their own active participation).]

We cite *Rashbam* fully:

'And Midianite merchants passed by. This occurred while they were sitting down partaking of their meal. They [the brothers] had positioned themselves at some distance from the pit so as to avoid [callously] 'eating on the blood', and they waited for the Ishmaelites they had seen. Before the Ishmaelites arrived, another group — Midianites — passed, saw Joseph in the pit, lifted him out, and sold him to the Ishmaelites. It may be that the brothers were unaware of it [until Reuben discovered his absence from the pit]. Though the Torah later states [Joseph's charge when he revealed himself to his brothers (45:4)]: *I am Joseph your brother* whom you sold to Egypt, this was meant only in the sense of their primary responsibility for the sale [by having thrown him into the pit in the first place]. This appears to me correct on the basis of profound interpretation of the plain meaning of Scripture. For the expression *then*

Midianite men, traders, passed by implies that they passed by quite coincidentally and they [not the brothers] sold him to the Ishmaelites.'

He continues, that 'even if one wishes to say [as *Rashi* does] that the phrase *they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites* means that the brothers sold him, then we would have to say that the brothers asked the Midianites to draw Joseph out of the pit, and afterwards they [the brothers] sold him to the Ishmaelites.'

According to those who follow the primary interpretation advanced by *Rashbam* that Joseph was sold without the knowledge of the brothers [clearly not the traditional Rabbinic interpretation], it would appear that the brothers thought he had died. Reuben discovered his disappearance and was convinced that a wild animal had killed him. They, too, were convinced that this was the case, and they devised the scheme of dipping his tunic in blood to protect themselves and convince their father that Joseph had indeed been devoured by a wild beast. Several texts are answered by this premise, including Judah's vehement insistence that Joseph was dead [44:20] as well as the intent of Joseph's later remark [40:15] *I was stolen* — not sold — *from the land of the Hebrews*. It also explains why — after the brothers suffered complete remorse for their act [42:22] — they did not go to all ends to find him and relieve their father's unconsolable anguish over Joseph's absence. [The Talmudic interpretation of these passages is dealt with in the commentary to the respective verses.]

בְּעֶשְׂרִים כֶּסֶף — *For twenty [pieces of] silver.*⁽¹⁾

— Two pieces of silver for each, which they used to buy shoes [see *Amos* 2:6]. Thus they heaped

1. The solemn ban against divulging what had occurred.

It is at this point that the brothers proposed to proclaim a *חרם*, solemn ban, forbidding anyone from divulging to Jacob what had occurred.

[It is noteworthy that according to *Sefer Chassidim*, ed. Mekitztei Nirdamim #1562, Joseph too was adjured by this dreaded oath. He was prohibited from attempting to return to Jacob.

וישב לו כט יוסף מצרימה: וישב ראוֹבֵן אֶל־הַבּוֹר והנה אין־יוסף בבֹר ויקרע את־בגדיו:

further indignity upon Joseph by buying shoes with the money. They said, We will tread upon him symbolically and we will see what will become of his dreams [v. 20]! (*Tanchuma; Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*). They settled for such a paltry sum since they were eager to be rid

or even notifying his father by word of mouth or letter of his whereabouts without their consent. This accounts for Joseph's failure to contact Jacob throughout his twenty-two year period in Egypt. Even had Joseph not consented to this dread oath, he was bound by it. Such is the law; when a quorum of ten adult males invoke a solemn ban, the entire community becomes bound by it.]

Judah said to them: 'Reuben is not here, and a ban by less than ten people is not valid' (Benjamin was absent, too). What did they do? — They associated the Almighty with them so that He should not reveal the matter of Jacob.

Because of the ban, the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not tell Jacob what had occurred. Though it is written [*Psalms 147:19*]: מְגִיד רָכְרוּ לְעַקֵּב, He declares His word to Jacob, He did not reveal this matter to him, and Jacob remained ignorant of what had occurred.

Isaac was still alive at this time. [As noted in the *comm.* to 35:29, he was to live another twelve years beyond Joseph's sale; cf. v. 2 s.v. יוֹסֵף]. He did know [prophetically] that Joseph was living, but seeing that God Himself did not reveal it, he did not dare reveal it (*Tanchuma; Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer; Rashi* v. 33 from *Midrash*). [When the brothers eventually told Jacob that Joseph was alive in Egypt, their decision to tell him was a *de facto* annulment of the ban. See also *comm.* to 41:51.]

For this same reason Isaac did not pray that God annul the decree and inform Jacob of Joseph's whereabouts, although it was certainly within his province as a *tzaddik* to do so. He realized that Jacob's ignorance of the event was essential to the Divine workings of Providence. That God informed Isaac at all of what had occurred was so that Isaac should not spend his last years grieving the 'death' of a grandson. Only Jacob deserved such grief because it was punishment for the grief he had caused his parents during his twenty-two years of absence. Furthermore, had Isaac — who died before Joseph's rise to eminence in Egypt was revealed — not been informed, he would have remained ignorant until his dying day that Joseph was indeed alive; Jacob, on the other hand, lived to see Joseph as a supreme regent of all Egypt (*Yafeh Toar*).

* * *

That God allowed Himself to be associated in this ban does not infer that He associates Himself with evil-doers וְרָעָם. He participated for several reasons:

(a) To prevent Jacob from pronouncing an eternal curse upon his progeny which would have had disastrous results for all time. If only his tears resulted in the death of the Ten Martyrs (see *comm.* above), how much more of an effect would his curse have had! (*Chemdas Yamim*).

(b) It was also part of the Divine Will that the family destiny unfold according to the Providential plan. The ultimate goal was that events should evolve into Jacob's honorable descent to Egypt. Had it been otherwise, he would never have left the sacred environs of Eretz Yisrael to go to the immoral Egypt; instead he would have sent emissaries to purchase Joseph's freedom (*Sifsei Kohen*).

(c) God desired that Joseph's twenty-two years of isolated absence during which Jacob was unaware of his welfare should be an atonement for the like period during which Jacob had been with Laban and had not fulfilled the *mitzvah* of honoring his parents (see on 29:18) (*Sefer Chassidim* ed. Mekeitzei Nirdamim #1562).

R' Bachya observes additionally that the notion of God associating Himself with man to make a quorum is not unprecedented. Abraham, too, had asked God to include His Majesty with the righteous of Sodom in order to make up the necessary quorum of ten to save the inhabitants [see on 18:28, s.v. הַתְּשׁוּתָם]. The brothers rationalized that it was justifiable to associate God with their oath in order to spare Jacob even greater grief and to prevent the eternal repercussions of his curse on his progeny.

37 Then they brought Joseph to Egypt.
29-30 ²⁹ Reuben returned to the pit – and behold, Joseph was not in the pit! So he rent his garments. ³⁰ Return-

of him at any price (Ralbag).

But couldn't the sale of the handsome Joseph have commanded a much higher price? – Perhaps it means twenty pieces of silver for each brother. Or according to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, since Joseph's face had a ghastly pallor from his fear of the serpents and scorpions, he looked sickly and they could not demand more for him (*Da'as Zekeinim*).

The Sages in *Yerushalmi Shekalim* 2:3 remark that because they sold Rachel's firstborn for twenty *dinarim* [a *shekel*=four *dinarim*] of silver, therefore we redeem our firstborns for twenty *dinarim* of silver (=five *shekalim*) [as an atonement for the misdeed of our ancestors (R' Bachya). See *Numbers* 18:15-6.]

Mechech Chochma [to *Exod.* 13 s.v. וְכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל] finds this puzzling. Why, he asks, should even descendants of Joseph have to redeem their firstborn by paying a sum to the *Kohanim*, descendants of Levi, when Levi [as noted in comm. to v. 19] was one of the prime instigators of the sale! He suggests, therefore, that *Yerushalmi's* intent is: In selling Joseph, Rachel's firstborn, Levi agreed that he was worth no more than five *shekalim*. Consequently Levi's descendants must also be content with accepting no more than that amount for the redemption of Israel's firstborn.

Furthermore, *Yerushalmi Shekalim* (ibid.) continues, since each brother's share of these twenty pieces of silver was two pieces of silver, equaling a half-shekel, we give a half-shekel annually for the Temple upkeep.

וְיָבִיאוּ אֶת יוֹסֵף מִצְרָיִמָּה – Then [lit. and] they [=the Midianites/Medanites (*Rashi*; *Mizrachi*)] brought Joseph to Egypt.

29. Reuben discovers Joseph's absence.

וַיָּשָׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל-הַבּוֹר – [Lit. and] Reuben returned to the pit.

– In order to rescue him and return him to Jacob [see comm. to v. 22].

Reuben was not present at Joseph's sale, it having been his turn to attend Jacob. Alternatively, he did not participate in the meal and was not present at the sale because he was occupied with fasting and sackcloth in penitence for having disarranged his father's couch [in the incident with Bilhah; see 35:22] (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).

Following the latter interpretation, the expression 'returned to the pit' has the metaphoric connotation of 'repented [=returned] to the original source of purity and sinlessness' (*Yafeh Toar*).

According to *Rashi's* first interpretation, the implication is that Reuben's absence was unavoidable; he had to leave Joseph in the pit at such a crucial time in order to perform the *mitzvah* of tending to his father's needs.

Following the second interpretation we must assume that Reuben's penitence was done in private. This would reconcile with the tradition cited by *Rashi* to *Deut.* 33:7 s.v. וְיָשָׁב רְאוּבֵן that Reuben repented the matter with Bilhah after Judah's penitence for his affair with Tamar. [See 38:26]. Apparently, since the episode of Tamar had not yet occurred, we must surmise that Reuben's penitence now was still private; after Judah repented, Reuben repented publicly (*Mizrachi*; *Tzeidah LaDerech*).

B'chor Shor differs in the literal sense with the suggestion that Reuben journeyed the long distance from Dothan to Hebron to look after his father for one day. See comm. to v. 25 end of s.v. וַיָּשָׁב.

According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*,

וַיֵּשֶׁב אֶל-אָחִיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִילֵךְ אִינְנוּ וְאָנִי
 לִזְלִלָהּ לָא אָנָּה אֲנִי-בָא: וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-כֶּתֶנֶת יוֹסֵף
 וַיִּשְׁחֲטוּ שָׁעִיר עֲזִים וַיִּטְבְּלוּ אֶת-הַכֶּתֶנֶת

Reuben had slipped away, awaiting an opportunity to rescue Joseph; therefore he was not present at the sale.^[1]

וַיִּקְרַע אֶת-בְּגָדָיו — So [lit. and] he rent his garments.

[In a manifestation of his grief.]
 [Cf. Jacob's rending in v. 34.]

30. הִילֵךְ אִינְנוּ — The boy is gone [lit. is not]!

— I do not even have his remains to bring back to Father! (Zohar).

וְאָנִי אָנָּה אֲנִי-בָא — And I — where can I go? [lit. and I, where shall I come?].

Where can I flee from my father's grief? (Rashi).

The sense is: The boy is missing and I [as the eldest son who will bear the greatest responsibility for the matter] must flee because of the grief this will cause Father. But where can I flee? (Maharshah).

Reuben despaired at the prospect of seeing Jacob's grief. By ignoring the terrible effect their deed would have on their father, the brothers acted more callously than Esau who resolved to murder Jacob only after the death of their father. But until Reuben proclaimed this consideration, the

brothers ignored it. That these righteous people could do so is further proof that they were helpless pawns in executing God's plan to bring Joseph to Egypt (Oznaim laTorah).

Another reason Reuben felt more responsible than the others was that it would be said that he was jealous of Joseph to whom Jacob had awarded the birthright after the incident of Bilhah [See I Chron. 5:1 and comm. to 35:23] (Chizkuni).

Also, Judah had made the proposal to sell Joseph, while Reuben had initially proposed throwing Joseph into the pit (ibid.).

Rablag perceives the sense to be: 'How can I appear before Father without even a trace of Joseph's corpse to prove he is dead. Jacob will sustain a hope that Joseph was kidnapped and make me search for him to the end of the world.'

The term בָּא usually refers to returning home: How can I possibly return home [to father]! (HaRechasim leBik'ah).^[2]

[We have preserved the idiomatic double use of the pronoun אֲנִי ... אָנִי. Ibn Ezra comments that this is but Hebrew style and that a single אָנִי would have sufficed. However, our translation attempts to reproduce the nuances of the Hebrew text whenever possible.]

1. Many disturbing questions arise regarding Reuben's handling of the situation:

Why didn't Reuben — who spent his time in penitence — take his portion of food and cast it to the starving Joseph in the pit? Why did he not save him while the brothers were eating; wouldn't that have been more appropriate than occupying himself with fasting and sackcloth while his brother was in mortal danger?

Only one response adequately answers all such questions: It was the absolute Will of Heaven that Joseph be brought down to Egypt! (Oznaim laTorah).

Asking the same question, Tzror HaMor concludes that Reuben had been waiting for an auspicious time to save Joseph. In the interim he isolated himself and engaged in acts of penitence, but Providence did not allow him to execute his intended rescue. His brothers sold Joseph before Reuben returned to the pit.

2. R' Hirsch notes that Reuben did not say where shall אֵלַי, I go; instead he used the word בָּא, come. This word has the connotation of coming home, or some other place where one has a feeling of belonging. Thus, Reuben's words should be understood as expressing a feeling of shame, as if to say, 'There is no place where I can hold up my head without feeling that

37 ing to his brothers he said, 'The boy is gone! And I —
31-32 where can I go?'

³¹ They took Joseph's tunic, slaughtered a goatling, and dipped the tunic in the blood. ³² They dis-

31. The brothers prepare an alibi.

[The Torah does not record the brothers' response to Reuben's outburst, and it is not entirely clear whether he learned what had really occurred. How their subsequent decision to dip Joseph's tunic in blood was a suitable response to Reuben's outburst similarly needs clarification]:

According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* and *Tanchuma Yashan*, they told Reuben what they had done and their ban against revealing it [see footnote v. 28]. When he heard the ban, he kept his peace.

According to the *Zohar*, they did not reveal the sale even to Reuben. Accordingly he believed that Joseph was dead until Joseph revealed himself to his brothers in Egypt.

The commentators who maintain that the brothers, too, were unaware that Midianites had snatched up Joseph from the pit and sold him, maintain that when Reuben informed them that Joseph was missing they *all* sincerely believed that Joseph had been devoured by a wild beast. Thus, they were not intentionally lying to their father. They brought the bloody tunic to assure him that indeed such was the case and that the matter was beyond their control and responsibility (see *Chizkuni*).

In any case, the dipping of Joseph's tunic in blood was a response to Reuben's outburst inasmuch as it provided him with the 'evidence' to convince Jacob that Joseph was indeed dead and not just missing. Otherwise, as mentioned above, Reuben was apprehensive that Jacob would have sent him, as the firstborn, to the very ends of the earth to find his still-living son (*Or HaChaim*).

At the same time it removed the culpability from all of the brothers. They knew that if they were to remain silent, Jacob would suspect them, for he knew of their hatred for Joseph (*Ramban* v. 32).

וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־כִּתְּמֵת יוֹסֵף — [And] they took Joseph's tunic.

The commentators differ as to whether the word *tunic* here refers to his *בְּתוּנָת פָּסִים*, *fine-woolen tunic*, or merely to his *undershirt* [lit. *under-tunic*] [cf. v. 23]. *Meleches Machsheves* in the next verse interprets that it was his *undershirt* that they dipped and sent to Jacob. The majority of commentators maintain, however, that they used his *fine woolen tunic*.

וַיִּשְׁחָטוּ שְׂעִיר עִזִּים — [And they] slaughtered a goatling.

They chose a goatling because its blood resembles human blood (*Rashi*).

The term שחט denotes ritual slaughter.

The *Midrash* notes that this passage vindicates the brothers against Joseph's earlier charges of eating flesh from living animals. Even in their degradation, they ritually slaughtered the goatling and would not eat its flesh while it was still alive [see *Rashi* to v. 2 s.v. וַיִּשְׁחָטוּ רְעָה].

Torah Sheleimah #181 cites a *Midrash* that even in this matter God was repaying Jacob measure for measure. Jacob had deceived his father with *skins of goat-kids* [27:16]; therefore his sons now deceived him with a goat. [See also 38:25.]

וַיִּטְבְּלוּ אֶת־הַכִּתְּמֵת בַּדָּם — And [they] dipped the tunic in the blood.

Rashi makes the grammatical

everyone will avoid me and hold recriminations against me — there is no place where I can "come home."

Why should only Reuben — and none of the others — have felt so responsible? He possibly

וישב לב
לז/לב-לג

בָּדָם: וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אֶת־כְּתָנֹת הַפָּסִים וַיְבִיאוּ
אֶל־אֲבֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֹאת מַעְאָנוּ הַכֶּרֶן־נָא
הַכְתָּנֹת בְּנֶךָ הוּא אִם־לֹא: וַיִּפְרֹחַ וַיֹּאמֶר
כְּתָנֹת בְּנֵי חַיָּה רְעָה אֲכַלְתֶּהוּ טָרֵף טָרֵף

note that the noun כִּתָּה in its absolute state is vowelized כִּתְּתָה. When it occurs in the construct state, it is vowelized כִּתְּתָה as in כִּתְּתָה יוֹסֵף, כִּתְּתָה פָּסִים, כִּתְּתָה בֶּדֶד.

32. וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ ... וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל אָבִיהֶם. — [And] they dispatched ... and they brought it to their father.

The expression *they dispatched* implies that they sent the information through messengers; and they — the messengers — *brought it to their father*. [The brothers did not want to be the ones to tell Jacob since their well-known dislike of Joseph might arouse Jacob's suspicion (*Chizkuni*). Additionally they did not want to be the 'foolish bearers of evil tidings' (*Gur Aryeh*), nor could they bear to witness Jacob's grief or lie to his face (*Oznaim leTorah*).] Possibly, they sent the tunic ahead to Hebron to await their own arrival, and later brought it to their father themselves, and told him they found it. They realized that silence would only have aroused Jacob's suspicion (*Ramban*).

According to *Targum Yonasan*, the brothers sent the tunic with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Since they were known to be Joseph's

blamed himself for not having acted more vigorously to prevent what had happened. He had started the *mitzvah* and then dropped it. His conscience bothered him — perhaps he had neglected his responsibility to save Joseph because in his subconscious he was as guilty as they of wanting to do away with Joseph.

There could have been another reason too. The fear that had driven the brothers was that Joseph would take away their independence. None of them had more to fear than Jacob's firstborn, Reuben. After all, Joseph was the firstborn of Jacob's intended wife. [In addition, Jacob had already conferred the double-portion of the firstborn upon Joseph.] Suspicion therefore would inevitably fall on Reuben.

friends [see comm. to v. 2 s.v. נְהוּגָא וְנֶעֱרַר], Jacob would not suspect them of foul play.

R' Bachya cites a Midrash that the brothers cast lots to determine who should bring the tunic, and Judah was chosen [comp. *Sotah* 10b cited below].

Ramban cites another translation [mentioned in Radak] of אֶת־שָׁרָן, according to which the verb, in our context means *and they pierced*; cf. הָרָשָׁה, *by the sword*, in Job 36:12. The intent is that they pierced the tunic with a sword in many places to give it the appearance of having been gnashed by a wild beast's fangs and claws. [Cf. *Gur Aryeh*].

וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֶה מָצָאנוּ — And [they said, 'We found this.']

As noted above, the brothers took turns coming back to Hebron to attend to Jacob's personal needs. When Joseph failed to return, Jacob asked each newly arrived son whether he had seen Joseph. Each, of course, answered in the negative whereupon Jacob instructed them all to search for him. This command gave them the pretext to bring home the bloody tunic which they claimed to have "found." Had there been no such contact between Jacob and his sons, they would have no justifiable

patched the fine woollen tunic and they brought it to their father, and said, 'We found this. Recognize, if you please: is it your son's tunic or not?' ³³ He recognized it and he said, 'My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph has surely been torn to

reason for bringing him a tunic that they "happened to find" (Oznaim laTorah).

הַבְּרִיָּא הַבְּתִנָּת בִּנְךָ הוּא אֵסִילָא – Recognize [cf. 31:32] if you please: Is it your son's tunic or not?¹¹¹

[According to the opinion that this was said by the brothers' messengers, it is obvious why they used the expression 'your son's tunic' rather than mentioned Joseph by name. If the brothers themselves said these words, we can perceive the extent of their hatred: even at this juncture they could not refer to him by name. Their words also carried the connotation of: *Is this the fine woollen tunic you gave to your darling son?* According to Sotah 10b it was Judah – their leader – who said this. He was later punished measure for measure when Tamar confronted him with these same words. See 38:25.]

Here, too, God was repaying Jacob measure for measure for the terror he inflicted on his father. Because Jacob deceived Isaac and caused him to ask in anguish [27:21]: האֵתָהּ הִנֵּה בְנִי עֶשָׂא אֵסִילָא, *Are you indeed my son Esau or not?* God now caused

Jacob's children to ask him [a question reflecting a similar phraseology]: הַבְּתִנָּת בִּנְךָ הוּא אֵסִילָא, *Is it your son's tunic or not?* (Tzror HaMor).

33. בְּתִנָּת בְּנִי – *My son's tunic!*

The phrase is elliptic and should be understood as if it read: בְּתִנָּת בְּנִי הִיא זֶה, *this is my son's tunic* (Rashi).

הוּא הָיָה רָעָה אֲכָלְתָּהּ – *A savage [lit. evil] beast devoured him!*¹¹²

Had robbers attacked him, they would not have left the tunic (Chizkuni).

A prophetic spirit was instilled within Jacob. His words contained the hidden meaning that Potiphar's wife – a bestial person – would attempt to devour him (Rashi; cf. Targum Yonasan).

Rashi cites the Midrash discussed in the footnote to v. 28 that God did not reveal the truth to Jacob because He had associated Himself with the brothers' ban prohibiting such disclosure. [See footnote to v. 28.]

סָרַף טָרַף יוֹסֵף – *Joseph has surely been torn to bits!*

[The translation attempts to con-

1. Meleches Machsheves suggests that the two 'distinct' designations in our narrative [*fine woollen tunic* and *tunic*] refer to two different garments: Jacob's special gift and Joseph's ordinary under-tunic. The brothers shrewdly did not dip the *fine woollen tunic* since a defacement of this symbol of their hatred for Joseph would have aroused Jacob's suspicion.

Therefore, *Joseph's tunic* mentioned in v. 31 was his ordinary tunic worn near his body – his undershirt. It was this they dipped in blood. Then they sent the *fine woollen tunic* away and hid it; it was the bloodstained undershirt – 'your son's tunic' – which they brought to Jacob and asked him to identify.

[The above differs with Ramban and most commentators who maintain that it was the בְּתִנָּת פָּסִים, *fine woollen tunic*, that they sent him so that he might recognize it by its uniqueness.]

2. The Sages [Yevamos 120b] rule that proof of a corpse's identity cannot be established from his clothing inasmuch as people are liable to lend their clothes. How then could Jacob have es-

וַיֹּשֶׁב לֹד-לֹדָהּ וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שְׂמֹלֵתוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם שָׁק
בְּמַתְּנָיו וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל-בְּנוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים:
לֹד וַיִּקְמֹו כָּל-בְּנוֹי וְכָל-בְּנֹתָיו לְנַחֲמוֹ וַיִּמְאֵן

vey the emphatic idiomatic force of the compound infinitive verbs. In Hebrew the passage literally reads: *Tear (infin. absolute) is torn Joseph!*

R' Hirsch accounts for the double verbs by rendering: '*Torn to pieces; Joseph has been torn to pieces!*' Jacob visualizes the horror of the event — his dear son, his beloved child in the flower of developing manhood, ripped by the snarling teeth of a beast of prey.

[Jacob suspected Judah of foul play in this matter. See Rashi on 49:9 מִשְׁרָף בְּנֵי עֲלִית.]

וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שְׂמֹלֵתוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם שָׁק בְּמַתְּנָיו — *Then [lit. and] Jacob rent his garments and [he] placed sackcloth on his loins.*

— In grievous mourning for his favorite son, and also because he felt responsible for having sent him to his death (Radak).

He *rent his garments* because of mourning; *he placed the sackcloth on his loins* as an act of penitence. For, as Mahari Weil writes in his Responsa: If one dispatched an

emissary to a dangerous area and that emissary is killed, the sender must undertake acts of penitence (Malbim).

The law of rending garments as a part of the mourning rites is not derived from our verse, since a binding *halachah* is not derived from events which preceded the giving of the Torah at Sinai. The Sages in *Moed Katan* 24a derive it as an *Asmachta* [Scriptural allusion] from Lev. 10:6 [see *Tosafos* there].

There is a noteworthy distinction between Reuben's rending in v. 29, and Jacob's. Reuben rent his *בגדים*, *outer garments*; Jacob *שְׂמֹלֵתוֹ*, more specifically *his shirt* i.e. even his undergarments (*Tur*).¹¹

וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל-בְּנוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים — [And] he mourned for [lit. upon] his son many days.

Rashi (based on *Megillah* 17a) explains *many days* as referring to *twenty-two years*, corresponding to the period that Jacob had been away from his parents' home. During that period Jacob had neglected to honor his parents and did not attend to their needs.

established by this bloodstained tunic that Joseph had definitely been devoured and torn to pieces?

— Possibly, since this fine woolen tunic had been given to Joseph by his father as a special mark of his esteem, he would have treasured it too much to lend it out. And the rule [ibid.] is that articles which are not generally lent may be used for identification (*Oznaim laTorah*).

1. R' Hirsch notes that the expression is usually *קָרַע שְׂמֹלֶה* not *קָרַע בִּגְד* *בִּגְד* is the outer garment by which people project their outward appearance (hence a *בִּגְד*, *traitor*, is the *בִּגְד* of a man; by having cast himself beyond the moral pale; he becomes a 'man' only in his outward appearance). Pain, grief, and shame are signified by tearing a garment, just as the outward relations of the people involved have been rent. Hence, mourning, too, is expressed by *קָרַע*, *rending, tearing*. It is the opposite of *שָׁלוֹם*, *peace*, related to *שָׁלֵם*, *whole*; thus, the torn condition which causes grief is the opposite of wholeness. To express the extent of his grief, Jacob tore even his *שְׂמֹלֶה*, generally worn next to the skin, and replaced his soft, comfortable undergarment with a *שָׁק*, *sackcloth*. (Sackcloth is made of goat-hair, and is often called a hair-shirt). The nature of the material made every movement an uncomfortable reminder of his grief, as if to remind him that he had not right to feel comfortable. Hence, also *וַיִּתְאַבֵּל*, *he kept himself in his grief*.

37 bits!' ³⁴ Then Jacob rent his garments and placed
34-35 sackcloth on his loins. He mourned for his son many
 days. ³⁵ All his sons and all his daughters tried to
 comfort him, but he refused to comfort himself, and

The chronology is as follows: Joseph was seventeen years old when this occurred [v. 2], and was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh [see 41:46], an interim of thirteen years. Add the seven years of plenty and two years of famine which elapsed before Jacob came to Egypt and we arrive at the total of twenty-two years that Joseph was away from his father. Jacob, too, was away twenty-two years: twenty in Laban's house, one and a half in Succoth and half year in Bethel.

Jacob alluded to this when he told Laban [31:41]: *וְהָיָה לִי עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה בְּבֵיתוֹךָ*, *this twenty years in your home is to me*, i.e., the responsibility for them lies upon me, and at some time in the future I will be punished for an equal period.

[See *Chronological Deductions* on page 1173, and footnote to 35:1 where it is explained why Jacob was punished for his stay in Laban's house when he had initially gone there at the command of his parents. (See also *comm.* to 30:25.)]

According to *Torah Temimah* [next verse] *many days* refers to *twelve months*.

35 — וַיָּקֻמוּ בָּלְבָנָיו וְכָל בְּנֵהוּ לְנַחֲמוֹ —
 [And] all his sons and all his daughters tried [lit. *crose*] to comfort him.

In the classical sense, they offered him the traditional Cup of Consolation and mourner's meal. Jacob had done similarly for Isaac when he cooked the lentils on the day Abraham died [see 25:29] (*Sechel Tov*).

According to *Or HaChaim*, the phraseology: *All his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him* suggests that their effort was planned: they all came together; the sight of his many other children was meant to console him.

§ The identity of Jacob's daughters-in-law

The plural *daughters* inspires a controversy in the Midrash inasmuch as Scripture specifically mentions only Dinah as a daughter of Jacob. R' Yehudah maintains that a twin daughter was born with each son, and the siblings married one another (see below). Thus Jacob had many daughters, all of whom tried to comfort him. R' Nechemiah maintains that the brothers were married to Canaanite women. The term *daughters* in our verse refers to Jacob's daughters-in-law, since it is quite common for one to refer to his son-in-law as his son, and to his daughter-in-law as his daughter (*Rashi*). [See 'Jacob's children' on p. 1313.]

Following the tradition cited by R' Yehudah that twin-sisters were born with each of the sons and that Jacob's sons and daughters married one another, we must presume that Leah's daughters married the sons of the maidservants. In that case they were brother and sister only by their father, and such marriage was not considered incestuous for a Noachide [i.e. for universal man, and before the Torah was given]. Although Abraham's progeny scrupulously observed the *mitzvos*

before the Torah was given [see p. 1083], in this case it was deemed preferable to marry a sister by their father — which was permissible at the time — than to marry a Canaanite. After all, one must recall Abraham's intense efforts to assure that Isaac would not marry a Canaanite [see 24:3] and Isaac's similar charge to Jacob [28:1].

Presumably, R' Nechemiah would follow the tradition given in *Pesachim* 50a which discusses the account of Judah marrying *בַּת אִשׁ כְּנֻעִי*, the daughter of a Canaanite man (38:2). Raising the question of how Judah could have violated the family tradition not to marry Canaanites, the Talmud there notes that in *Hosea* 12:8 [and also in *Proverbs* 31:24] the word *כְּנֻעִי* means *merchant*. Consequently, Judah married not the daughter of a Canaanite, but the daughter of a *merchant*. Assuming that R' Nechemiah follows this interpretation, he would maintain that the brothers married the daughters of foreign merchants. These daughters-in-law are the 'daughters' who comforted Jacob; his only *true* daughter was Dinah. Or Jacob may have had other daughters, the twins of his sons, who were not married to his sons. (See *Ramban* to 38:2; *Mizrachi*; *Ralbag*; *Akeidas Yitzchak*; *Maskil l'David*; cf. *Rashi* 46:26 and *Ramban* *ibid* v. 15).

According to *Ramban*, the plural *daughters* refers to Jacob's daughter, Dinah, and his granddaughter [Serach, the daughter of Asher (mentioned in *Numbers* 26:46)] (*R' Bachya*).]

[The only other granddaughter of Jacob

recorded in the Torah is Yocheved daughter of Levi. But she was not yet born at this time.]

The Rabbinic interpretation that *daughters* here refers either literally to the twin sisters of Jacob's sons whom the Torah had no need to mention until now, or is a term of endearment for Jacob's daughters-in-law, is based also on the tradition cited by *Onkelos* [see *Ramban* to *Numbers* 26:46] that Serach was not Jacob's natural granddaughter. According to that interpretation [not shared by all commentators] the term *daughter* could not apply to her.

וַיִּמָּן לְהַתְנַחֵם — But [lit. and] he refused to comfort himself.

There had never been a case of a child's death in the house of the Patriarchs because the race of the righteous is blessed. This is why Jacob mourned for his son so long and refused to allow himself to be comforted. In addition to his great love for Joseph he considered this to be a severe punishment intended for him (*Ramban* to 38:7).

Thus, in addition to the fact that Joseph was his favorite son by his favorite wife and he found his loss unbearable (*Alshich*), Jacob constantly recriminated over his past actions and blamed himself for having sent Joseph on his ill-fated mission (*Chizkuni*; *Sforno*). He also would constantly recall Joseph's faithfulness. Though Joseph knew the mission was dangerous, he undertook it unquestioningly. Jacob could not be consoled over the loss of such a faithful child (*Alshich*).

Furthermore, Jacob continued to nurse the hope that Joseph's remains might some day be discovered so that he could be given a proper burial (*Gur Aryeh*).

R' Hirsch notes the use of the reflexive *לְהַתְנַחֵם*, lit. to comfort himself

37 said: 'For I will go down to the grave mourning for 35

[rather than the passive לְהַנְחִיחַ, to be comforted]. He explains that consolation can never be imposed by an outsider. One can only offer a mourner reasons for consolation and hope he will accept them emotionally and intellectually. Jacob, however, would not permit himself to be influenced by such arguments; he refused to comfort himself.

Their words of consolation are not recorded in the Torah. What could they possibly have said under the circumstances! Their vain attempts fell upon deaf ears; their empty words could not move their venerable father from his tragic sense of loss of the son in whom he saw the personification of his own destiny; the son to whom he imparted the Torah he had learned in the Academy of Eber, and the son to whom the forfeited birthright of Reuben had passed after the inci-

dent with Bilhah (*Chiddushei HaRim*).⁽¹⁾

וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי אֶרְדּוּ אֶל-בְּנֵי אָבִל שְׂאֵלָה —
And [he] said, For I will go down to the grave mourning for my son [lit. because I will go down to my son as a mourner to the grave].

— Literally שְׂאֵלָה means *grave*, the sense of the passage being: I will be buried while still in mourning — i.e., I will mourn for my son even to the day of my own burial, and shall never be consoled for him all my life. Midrashically, שְׂאֵלָה refers to *Gehinnom*. "I was given this omen by God: If none of my sons die during my lifetime I may be assured that I will not see *Gehinnom*." [The Midrashic sense of the passage would then be: 'Because of my son's death, I am convinced that I will descend as a mourner to *Gehinnom*'] (*Rashi*).⁽²⁾

1. *Rashi* cites the Rabbinic insight that no one can be consoled for the loss of a person who is actually alive. It is a Divine decree that the dead be forgotten — but not the living. This is adduced from *Psalms* 31:13: *I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind* (*Soferim* 21).

Even psychologically the known death of a loved one carries with it a certain finality since it is reversible only by תְּחִיַּת הַמֵּתִים, *Resurrection*. However, one never gives up hope for a person who is only presumed to be dead. Such a person is never forgotten. When the dead person is buried, the decree is that he is forgotten after twelve months; hence King David in *Psalms* [88:13] writes of the earth of forgetfulness. But if one is still alive, constant inquiries are made as to his whereabouts in the hope that he might be found (*Akeidah Yitzchak*).

In view of the teaching of the Sages that one does not accept consolation for a person who is still alive, why did Jacob not realize from his own disconsolate state that Jacob was not dead?

— As *Rashi* notes, it had been revealed to Jacob that if any of his children predeceased him, it would be a portent that he, Jacob, would suffer the judgment of *Gehinnom*. Hence, while it is true that one forgets a dear one who is dead and forever gone, Jacob could not be oblivious to a terrible fate that he 'knew' awaited him (*Gur Aryeh*).

— After so much time went by without his grief being diminished, Jacob did realize that Joseph must be alive. But he reasoned that the bloody tunic indicated that a beast had attacked Joseph and, although he escaped with his life, he must have been badly hurt. To make matters worse, his continued absence indicated that he must have been enslaved. So Jacob's beloved son was living as a maimed, brutally treated slave — surely an adequate cause for intense grief (*Levush*).

— Although Jacob realized that Joseph had survived the initial attack, he might have died at any time during the succeeding years. Therefore, Jacob constantly felt as though he might just have lost his son (*Divrei David*).

2. When Jacob had gone to Laban, the Divine Presence said to him, 'Jacob my son, lift up your eyes heavenward and see the twelve signs of the zodiac. There are twelve hours in the day and twelve in the night. They correspond to the twelve tribes who will rise from you.'

Now, upon discovering Joseph's loss, Jacob wept and said, 'Now the covenant of the tribes

וישב לו שאלה ניבך אתו אביו והמרנים מכרו אתו אל-מצרים לפוטיפר סרים פרעה לז/לו

[On *She'ol* see also 42:37.]

Because of my negligence in sending my son to a place I knew to be wrought with mortal danger I will go to my own grave still in mourning (*Chizkuni*).

Kli Chemdah uniquely interprets this as an incredulous question: *Can I go down to my son as a mourner to [his] grave?* I.e., do I then know where my son is buried so I can go to weep at his grave and gain some consolation thereby? This not being the case, I am inconsolable.

[My father, Harav Aron Zlotowitz שליט"א once similarly explained homiletically that Rachel's 'lamentation and bitter weeping' for her children described by Jeremiah [31:14] was for the same reason. As the Prophet writes: *She refused to be comforted for her children* איננו כי, *because they were not* — i.e. because they were not in her proximity. They were dying in Exile and did not leave even a grave where their mothers could shed a tear.]

The phrase *אלי-בני* [lit. *to my son*] in this passage has the sense of *על בני* *on account of* [lit. *upon*] *my son*. *אל* often means *על* in Scripture, e.g. *II Sam. 4:21: ... אל שאול ואל בית הרמים* (*Rashi*).

According to *Radak*: *I will go to my son and be gathered to his people* [see on 25:8].

ויבך אתו אביו — *And his father bewailed him.*

Jacob is already the subject of this verse. Therefore *his father* refers to *Jacob's* father, the sense being:

Isaac bewailed Jacob (Riva).

Isaac wept for Jacob's sorrow, but he did not actually *observe mourning* along with him [see v. 33] because he knew that Joseph was alive (*Rashi*).

That is, while in Jacob's presence Isaac would display his empathy and pretend to mourn. For indeed such is required by etiquette: *כל המתאבל עליו מתאבל עמו לפניו*, 'when in the presence of a mourner for whom one himself must mourn [such as a father in the presence of his bereaved son or a husband in the presence of his bereaved wife] one must *outwardly* mourn too.' But when Isaac was not in Jacob's presence, he did not mourn because he knew Joseph was alive (*Chizkuni* from *Midrash*).

[See footnote to v. 28 regarding why Isaac did not reveal this knowledge to his son.]

According to *Sforno*, Isaac bewailed that Jacob had assumed life-long mourning, for such a posture of grief would keep the Divine Presence away from him [since It does not descend on one who is sad] (*Sforno*).

[And so it was. For the Divine Spirit which had left him did not return to Jacob until he heard the news that Joseph was still alive; then his spirit revived. See *Rashi* to 45:27].

Or *HaChaim* [following *Ralbag*] maintains that our verse refers to *Joseph's* father, Jacob, the sense be-

has been broken! How many struggles have I endured raising these twelve children. Now that there are no longer twelve, the covenant has been abrogated since these twelve tribes paralleled the twelve signs of the zodiac, the twelve months of the year, the twelve hours of the day and of the night and the twelve precious stones that the High Priest will one day wear in his breastplate. It is all now gone! ... (*Seder Eliyahu Rabbah; Tanchuma Yashan*).

The *Zohar* observes that Jacob maintained a state of celibacy during this mourning period, for all his wives had already died by that time. He also did not remarry in order to have another son to take Joseph's place because of the oath he had made to Laban not to take any other wives [see 31:50].

37 my son.' And his father bewailed him.
 36 ³⁶ Now the Medanites had sold him to Egypt, for Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh, the Chamberlain of

ing: Thus Jacob bewailed Joseph. The Torah refers to Jacob as his, i.e., Joseph's father, who bewailed Joseph so intensely; not the others who hated him [see below 42:36 s.v. עָלִי].^[1]

Significantly, Jacob's weeping is mentioned last in the narrative. The term *בָּכָה עָלָיו*, unlike *עָלָיו*, denotes an inner grief that is manifested outwardly only by an occasional tear that could not be restrained. The stray tear is but proof of the constant grief that is stifled within. Thus, our final phrase tells us that Jacob still bewailed Joseph even after all the others had stopped consoling him and had forgotten his misfortune (R' Hirsch).

36. וְהַמְדִּינִים מָכְרוּ אוֹתוֹ אֶל מִצְרַיִם — Now [lit. and; i.e., in the interim] the Medanites had sold him to Egypt.

The word *אֶל*, to, in this context has the sense of in: they sold him in Egypt. Cf. *Exod.* 25:21: *אֶל הָאָרוֹן*, in the ark; *Num.* 19:17: *אֶל כְּלֵי*, in the vessel (Chizkuni).

According to *Midrash Tanchuma*, the Medanites sold him to the public trustee [הַמוֹסֵף שֶׁל מִדְיָנָה] who in turn — after verification by the Ishmaelites that he was rightfully theirs to sell — sold him to Potiphar.

On the identity of the Midianites/Medanites, see controversy expounded in the commentary to v. 28. The prevalent view followed by most

commentators is that they were brother tribes — both Midian and Medan being listed in 25:2 as sons of Abraham by Keturah. The Torah therefore refers to them alternately by either name. Others interpret that in introducing the new name Medanites, the Torah is alluding to an additional unrecorded sale.

לְפוֹטִיפָר כְּרִיס פָּרָעָה — For [or: to] Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh.

The term *כְּרִיס*, often translated *eunuch*, has two meanings. Sometimes it describes one who had been made incapable of reproduction; sometimes it means a court official. In Potiphar's case, the latter interpretation is indicated since he was married and Asenath was presumably his daughter. Hence most commentators render it in the general sense of court official. [Cf. *Onkelos*: לְפוֹטִיפָר רִבָּא דְּפָרָעָה.]

The *Midrash* [86:3] understands *כְּרִיס* in its familiar sense of *eunuch*; *castrate*, and explains that Potiphar had purchased Joseph for purposes of sodomy, whereupon the Holy One, Blessed be He emasculated him, making him an eunuch [see 39:1].

[The Midrashic interpretation is not necessarily at variance with the literal sense. Potiphar could have been emasculated after his daughter was born. See comm. to 39:1, 6 and 19 where this interpretation is postulated.]

[Pharaoh was not the personal name of the king, but the royal title of the Egyptian monarchs. See on 12:15.]

1. After such a terrible occurrence one criticizes himself very sharply and does not forgive himself the slightest slip. Jacob's weeping was inspired also by remorse over his own misdeeds [interpreting: *וַיִּבְכֶּה אוֹתוֹ*=and he bewailed himself]: 'Perhaps I am being punished,' he exclaimed, 'for having married two sisters; or possibly for having derived benefit from Laban's money or from Shechem's money, and the Covenant God made with me has been annulled.' God's mercy was immediately aroused, and He granted Jacob seventeen good years in his old age (*Seder Eliyahu Rabbah*).

וישב
לח-א-ב

שֶׁר הַטְּבָחִים:

רביעי

א וַיְהִי בְעֵת הַהוּא וַיֵּרֶד יְהוֹנָדָה מֵאֵת אָחִיו
ב וַיֵּט עַד-אִישׁ עַרְלָמִי וּשְׁמוֹ חִירָה: וַיֵּרֶא-

The Chamberlain of the Butchers.

The Hebrew literally means *the chamberlain of the slaughterers*. The translation follows *Rashi* who explains שֶׁר הַטְּבָחִים to refer to the chief of 'the slaughterers of the king's animals.'

Ramban following *Onkelos* renders it as: *the chief executioner*.

Radak in *Shorashim* notes that the term טבוח, *slaughter*, can refer equally to animals or people, the latter being the probable interpretation here.

[Comp. comm. to 39:1.]

Rashi prefers the rendering of *butcher* since he finds it distasteful to assume that God would allow Joseph — who was spared even the foul odor of Ishmaelites' regular wares (see *Rashi* v. 25) — to be sold to one as detestable as an executioner. However, following *Onkelos* who did render it as *executioner* we must assume that Potiphar did not execute criminals personally, but was in charge of those criminals sentenced to death and delegated the killing to others (*Gur Aryeh*).

— Therefore, we later [40:3] find him also in charge of the prison (*Ralbag*).

Some cite in support of *Onkelos* the in-

terpretation that the Egyptians — who considered sheep to be sacred [cf. 43:34; *Exod.* 8:22] — did not eat meat. Therefore, why would Pharaoh require a butcher? — *Mizrachi* maintains, however, that the Egyptians refrained from eating only *sheep*, but *did* eat beef and flesh of other animals. To imply this, *Rashi* says בְּהֵמוֹת, *animals* [i.e., cattle], not צֶאֱנָן, *sheep* (see *Tzeidah laDerech*; *Maskil l'David*).

Divrei David finds it unusual however, that *Rashi* in this case differs with *Onkelos* without even citing his opinion. He suggests that it would appear that *Rashi* understands even *Onkelos* who renders the term in Aramaic כְּרִי קְטוּלָא as referring to *butchering* since in translating the passage [Lev. 24:18] וַיַּכּוּ נֶפֶשׁ בְּהֵמָה, *He that kills a beast*, *Onkelos* uses the same term קְטוּלָא.

The end of the chapter emphasizes that Joseph was sold several times and to several people. And so the brothers completely lost track of him and he could not be found. The end of the chapter takes us then right to the heart of tragedy. The brothers probably shared the vague feeling that Joseph was not gone forever. Therefore, they could bear their father's suffering because they were convinced that sooner or later his suffering would give way to the joy of finding his lost son. But for the moment, the Patriarchal family was plunged into despair (*R' Munk*).

XXXVIII

1. Judah and Tamar: The roots of the Messiah and The Israelite monarchy.

וַיְהִי בְעֵת הַהוּא וַיֵּרֶד יְהוֹנָדָה מֵאֵת אָחִיו
— [And] it was at that time that [lit. and] Judah went down from his brothers.

Judah 'went down' in the sense that he was *deposed* by his brothers from his position of leadership. This narrative is placed here inter-

rupting the story of Joseph to teach how Judah was lowered in esteem by his brothers as a result of the incident with Joseph. [That is, although this episode did indeed occur after the sale of Joseph, the Torah — which axiomatically does not concern itself with strict chronological order — would not have inserted it in the middle of the ongoing narrative of Joseph unless there were some connection

It was at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned away towards an Adullamite man whose name was Hirah. ² There Judah saw the

between Joseph's sale and Judah's fall (Mizrachi).^[1] For when the brothers saw their father's intense grief, they blamed Judah for it and deposed him from his leadership over them. 'You told us to sell him,' they complained. 'Had you advised us to send him back to Father, we would have listened!' (Rashi from *Midrash*; See also footnote to v. 2).

The *Tanchuma* continues: They pronounced a ban on him and accordingly he went down from his brothers ... i.e., he was censured by them and they demoted him from his position of authority. [Cf. *Sotah* 13b where Judah is castigated for having dropped his efforts to save Joseph.] Nevertheless of all Jacob's sons, the Holy One Blessed be He chose Judah to rule His people, as it says [49:10]: *The scepter shall not depart from Judah.*

Rashi's exegesis that Judah's 'descent' occurred after the sale of Joseph follows the Rabbinic tradition echoed in *Midrash Rabba*; *Tanchuma*; *Tanchuma Yashan*; *Midrash Aggadah* and specifically in *Seder Olam* - [see below] that these events transpired in the twenty-two year period between Joseph's sale and Jacob's descent with his family to Egypt. The twenty-two year interval is calculated by Rashi in his comm. to 37:24 s.v. *יָמֵינוּ עַל בְּנוֹ* יִמְיָנוּ. Briefly, Joseph was seventeen years old when he was sold, and thirty when he stood before Pharaoh — a lapse of thirteen years. Add the seven years of plenty and two of famine at which time Jacob and his family descended to Egypt — the aggregate total is twenty-two years.

Ibn Ezra differs and maintains that at that time is an indefinite phrase used concerning events which occurred either several years

earlier or later. Cf. *Deut.* 10:7, 8. In our verse *Ibn Ezra* interprets that the incident preceded the sale of Joseph since he finds it difficult to interpret that all the events narrated in this chapter could have been compressed in the twenty-two aggregate period between Joseph's sale and Jacob's descent to Egypt. He notes that the Torah tells us that Onan, Judah's second son, reached the age when he was capable of begetting children, which means that he must have been at least twelve years old. Additionally, after a considerable interval — presumably at least two years — Peretz was born. The latter had grown up and had two sons, Chetzron and Chamul, by the time Jacob's family descended to Egypt. Accordingly, he postulates that this narrative must have spanned a total of more than twenty-two years.

He suggests, therefore, that the Torah's purpose in breaking into the natural sequence and narrating the incident at this point rather than earlier when Judah had actually separated from his brothers and married the daughter of Shua, was to draw a contrast between Joseph's conduct in connection with Potiphar's wife and Judah's in connection with Tamar. [Cf. *Ibn Ezra* to *Deut.* 10:7, 8 and *Numb.* 3:1.]

Ralbag concurs. He suggests that Judah went off on his own because he had considerable flocks of his own, possibly acquired in the plunder of Shechem. Nevertheless, he regularly commuted back to his family to help tend Jacob's flocks and those of his brothers. That explains why he was present at the sale of Joseph.

Mizrachi defends the traditional Rabbinic chronology that all these events occurred within the twenty-two year period of Joseph's absence. He notes that the Sages (*Sanhedrin* 69b referring to Caleb begetting Chur) record that in those days people of eight were capable of becoming fathers.

1. According to R' Leazar's view in the *Midrash*, the narrative of Judah and Tamar was inserted here in order to bring the two passages of 'descent' together [קָרַב לְסִמּוּךְ יִרְדָּה וְיִרְדָּה] — [Judah's descent from his brothers, and Joseph's descent to Egypt; also Judah's spiritual decline, and Joseph's enslavement]; according to R' Yochanan: In order to couple the two passages הִדְרִינָא, identify, if you please [37:23, and below, v. 25. — The sons said this to Jacob and Tamar said it to Judah; this was regarded as measure for measure].

Hence, all the events in this episode transpired quite comfortably within the twenty-two year period following the sale of Joseph. [For details of this chronology, see *Seder Olam* #2.] That Er and Onan were subject to the death penalty at so tender an age is no more difficult than their culpability at age thirteen. In either case this poses a problem since the Heavenly Court does not inflict punishment under the age of twenty. See *Oznaim l'Torah* cited in v. 7.

[That the incident of Judah followed the sale of Joseph is maintained also by *Radak*, *Chizkuni*, *Abarbanel* and *Sforno*.]

Sforno comments that Judah's ordeal occurred after Joseph's sale, and that it was in punishment for Judah's role in causing Jacob to be bereaved. Judah's culpability was great and he was now repaid according to the fruit of his action by being bereaved of his two sons. Now he would personally experience the sort of cruel suffering he caused his father. [Cf. *Ramban* to v. 7.]

Cf. *Sanhedrin* 102a where the phrase *בְּעַת הַהִיא*, at that time, is interpreted to allude to the fact that it was 'a time predestined for tribulation' [a reference to the tribulations recounted in this chapter; see *Torah Temimah*].

According to R' David Feinstein, this 'time of tribulation' was the punishment noted below in the comm. to v. 7 that one who leaves a *mitzvah* unfinished runs the danger of losing his wife and children.

As noted above, the phrase Judah *went down* is interpreted homiletically in the Talmud to imply the spiritual decline of Judah's loss of position of leadership within the family. However, following the literal interpretation, the term *went down* implies: from the rocky hills around Hebron to Adullam, in the foothill district southwest of Jerusalem. [See below] (*Heidenheim*; cf. *Radak*).

Ibn Ezra accordingly observes that when one travels from the north to the south he is said to 'descend.'

Among other interpretations regarding Judah's descent from his brothers are:

Targum: His fortunes took a turn for the worse and he lost his influence; he therefore sought solitude (cf. *Oznaim l'Torah*).

Chizkuni: He could not bear to witness his father's inconsolable grief at Joseph's absence, and he therefore separated himself from his family.

However, his separation from them was not total — we see that he was present when his father dispatched the brothers to Egypt (*Abarbanel*; see *Ralbag* above).

וַיֵּט עַד-אִישׁ צֶרְלָמִי — And turned away [from the root *נָטָה*; *Targum Yonasan*: and inclined] towards [lit. until] an Adullamite man.

I.e. he turned away from his brothers and became partners with a certain Adullamite man (*Rashi*).

According to *Radak*, the sense of the passage is: he camped [in the elliptical sense of *וַיֵּט אֶהְיֶה*] with his flocks from place to place until he came to Adullam where he became associated with this man.

[The term Adullamite refers to one from the region of Adullam in the Shefelah (see *Joshua* 37:14; 15:35). *Ramban* mentions that it was a Canaanite region. In *Joshua* 12:15 the king of Adullam is listed among the kings of Canaan. Although Scripturally its exact location cannot be ascertained, some identify Adullam with the modern Aid el-ma, seventeen miles southwest of Jerusalem.]

וְשְׁמוֹ חִירָה — Whose name [lit. and his name] was Hirah.

Some Sages in the *Midrash* identify him with Hiram of King David's time, of whom there is a further tradition that he lived to the time of Ezekiel. According to the various traditions, then, he would have enjoyed the exceptional longevity of between 1100 and 1500 years!

Many commentators, however, maintain that Hirah was not necessarily Hiram, but the ancestor of Hiram's

family. [*Gur Aryeh* to 14:13 offers a similar interpretation in discussing the exceptional longevity attributed to Og.] His family apparently lived near Hebron. Later we find them in Tyre, to the north of Eretz Yisrael. Judah's friendship with this ancestor of the Tyres is perceived as another example of the Patriarchal family portending the destiny of its descendants. In the days of the Israelite Monarchy, the Tyres were traditionally Israel's friendliest neighbor, and Hiram, King of Tyre, was always a friend of King David [*1 Kings* 5:15]. He supplied much of the material for the Temple, and entered into a treaty with Solomon. Because Judah's warm friendship with Hiram was the seed of this later development, his name is recorded in the Torah (*Akeidas Yitzchak*; *Maharal*; see *Da'as Soferim*).

וַיָּאָם יְהוּדָה בְּתִיָּאִשׁ כְּנָעִי וְשֵׁם
שׁוּעַ — [And] there [i.e., in Adullam]
Judah saw the daughter of a promi-
nent [אִישׁ] merchant [כְּנָעִי] whose
name was Shua.¹¹

The translation *prominent* is based on the word אִישׁ, literally *man*, which has the connotation of a distinguished, respected person (*Abarbanel*).

Judah particularly noticed her because she was not of the regular Canaanite community (*Ramban*; see below).

Her own name is not given; only that of her father. The reason for this anonymity is uncertain (*Radak*).

— Perhaps she was not outstanding; Judah married her on account of her father's importance (*Ramban*).

In addition to being the daughter of Shua, it may be that her name was *Bath Shua*. Compare the name Bath Sheba (*Abarbanel*).

The Hebrew literally reads: *the daughter of a Canaanite*. The translation of כְּנָעִי as *merchant* follows *Onkelos*, *Rashi*, *Ibn Ezra*'s first interpretation, *Radak*, *Ramban*, *Ralbag* and *Abarbanel*.

This interpretation is based on *Pesachim* 50a where it is remarked: Is it possible that Abraham exhorted Isaac, and Isaac Jacob [not to marry a Canaanite woman] and yet Judah went and married one! — Rather, the term 'daughter of a Canaanite' in this context denotes daughter of a *merchant*. This is the meaning of the term *Canaanite* in *Hoshea* 12:8 and *Isaiah* 23:8.

— She was a daughter of one of the foreign traders who trafficked through Canaan selling their wares, for all Jacob's sons guarded themselves — as did their fathers before them — from marrying the accursed Canaanites [see 9:25]. Simeon was the only one among them who did marry a Canaanite woman, and he is derided for it when his son is called *Shaul, son of the Canaanite woman* [46:10]. Even in that case

1. The *Midrash* penetratingly perceives the Providential Hand of God at work in this narrative and at the same time accounts for its placement here:

The tribes were occupied with the sale of Joseph; Joseph was occupied with his sackcloth and fast [doing penitence because of the trouble that had befallen him]; Reuben was occupied with his sackcloth and fast [over the incident with Bilhah]; Jacob was occupied with his sackcloth and fast [unconsolably mourning the loss of his son]; and Judah was occupied with taking a wife. And the Holy One, Blessed be He, was occupied with creating the light of the King Messiah.

[Thus before subjecting His people to their first exile, God had already prepared the light of the future Redeemer. For "God creates the healing before the illness" (*Meg.* 13b)] (*Midrash*; see *Overview to ArtScroll Ruth* p. xix).

וַיִּשָּׁב לַח־גִּיהֶּ 1 וַיִּקְחָהּ וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ: וַתֵּהָר וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן
 2 וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ עֹד: וַתֵּהָר עֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן
 3 וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ אוֹנָן: וַתִּסֶּף עֹד וַתֵּלֶד

the Sages expounded that *Canaanite woman* was a reference to Dinah who had been forced to live with the Canaanite Shechem [and whom Simeon later married; see *comm.* to 34:26 s.v. וַיִּקְחוּ] (*Radak*; *Ramban*).

Why, then is Shua described by the ambiguous term '*Canaanite*' which is only rarely used in this sense of 'merchant'? Apparently the Torah wishes to stress that although Judah's wife was of foreign descent, she and her family were adversely affected by their association with the tainted Canaanite people (*Alshich*).

Ramban proceeds to discuss the differing Midrashic opinion of R' Nechemiah [already cited above in the *comm.* to 37:35; see there] who maintains that the brothers married Canaanite women.

Ramban explains this to mean that the tribal ancestors married foreign women whose fathers were passing through Canaan at the time, for it is illogical to assume that they all married women who were descended from the accursed servile Canaanite nation. Had this been the case, then Abraham's descendants would share their claim to *Eretz Yisrael* with the descendants of Canaan whom the former had been commanded to replace and destroy until neither remnant nor survivor remained.

That *Canaanite* here has its other meaning of 'merchant' or 'trader' follows from the context. Everyone in that area including the Perizzites, Jebusites and their brother clans as well as those of Adullam [whose king is mentioned in *Josh.* 12:15 among the kings of Canaan] was assumed to be of Canaanite descent. Had the term Canaanite therefore merely referred to Shua's genealogy, it

would have been superfluous to mention it. Therefore the term has its other meaning of merchant. Shua was a foreigner whom Judah met in Canaan, and whose daughter he married. Although in *1 Chronicles* 2:3 Judah's wife herself is referred to as the *Canaanite* [which certainly would seem to indicate that she was of Canaanite stock], there too the word means 'merchant'. Because her father was known as the כְּנַעֲנִי = '*merchant*' *par excellence*, she, too, came to be referred to by this designation, being his daughter.

Tamar, too, was not of Canaanite descent but the daughter of one of the aliens in the land. 'Far be it that our lord David [who descended from Judah and Tamar (see *Ruth* 4:15-22)], and righteous Messiah who will speedily reveal himself to us, be a descendant of the accursed Canaan!' (*Ramban*).

[There are, however, conflicting Midrashim on the matter. *Midrash HaGadol* cites *Malachi* 2:11: *Judah has dealt treacherously*, which it interprets as a reference to Judah's [spiritual] 'descent' due to his marriage to a Canaanite: '...He married what even Esau eventually rejected. For even Esau saw how displeasing Canaanite women were to Isaac his father and married an Ishmaelite instead, yet Judah went and married a Canaanite!' Cf. also *Aggadat Bereishis* 864.]

וַיִּקְחָהּ וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ — [And] he married [lit. took] her and consorted with her.

The translation of וַיִּקְחָהּ as he married follows *Onkelos* who renders: וַיִּסְבָּהּ.

— First he married her and then consorted; his relations with her were not illicit (*Radak*).

The *Midrash* understands took in the sense of: he spoke persuasively to her in order to consort with her:

Shua. He married her and consorted with her ³ She conceived and bore a son and he named him Er. ⁴ She conceived again and bore a son and she named him Onan. ⁵ And yet again and she bore a son; and named

'You are fortunate' he said, 'for the opportunity to unite with the offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and come under the wings of the Shechinah.' She consented, and she became a proselyte. He then married her. [Comp. this use of נִיחָם meaning *persuaded with soothing words* in 12:5].

3. Er.

This birth, according to *Seder Olam*, took place one year after the sale of Joseph.

וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ עֵר — And he named him Er.

I.e., Judah gave him this name which, in the literal sense, means: *Awaken!* (Ramban).

Midrashically, the name indicates that this child would be prematurely *wiped out* [הוּצָר from the root [עֲרָה] from the world. According to *Targum Yonasan* the name indicates that he was destined to die childless [עֲרִירִי; see on *Levit.* 20:20]. Of course, this was not Judah's intent when he gave this name to the child. It is an exposition of the Sages who maintain that names contain prophetic prognostications of the future (Ramban).

That is, our ancestors were endowed with a prophetic spirit, and in naming their children they were unconsciously prophesying future events without always realizing the significance of the worlds they were uttering (*Sechel Tov*).

4. Onan.

וַתִּהְיֶה עוֹר וְנָתַלָּר בֶּן — She conceived again and bore a son.

This occurred in the second year after the sale of Joseph (*Seder Olam*).

וַתִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ אוֹנָן — And she named him Onan.

Judah had named the firstborn son and his wife named their second child. The word אֵנָן has the connotation of *complaining* [*Numb.* 11:1 and *Lamen.* 3:39] and *sorrow*, as in the case of Rachel who named her child Ben Oni [lit. son of my sorrow; mourning] (see *comm.* to 35:18). Perhaps Judah's wife experienced difficult labor pains and named him accordingly. The mother of Yaavetz [from עֹצַב *pain*] so named him because of her labor pains [*I Chronicles* 4:9], as did Atarah the mother of Onam [*ibid.* 2:26]. For a similar reason Rachel called her second son Ben Oni. Although Jacob changed the tragic name Ben Oni to Benjamin, Judah did not feel it was necessary for him to change Onan's name [to one with a more optimistic connotation] (Ramban).

According to the *Midrash*, the name — connoting *grief* and *mourning* — refers prophetically to the grief he would bring himself and the mourning he would cause his father [by his premature death].

Cf. *Targum Yonasan*: '... and she called his name Onan because his father would have to mourn for him.'

וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּלִדְתָּהּ אֶת־וְיָקָח יְהוֹדָה אִשָּׁה לְעֶרְ
בְּכֹרֹו וְשָׁמָּה תָמַר: וַיְהִי עֶרְ בְּכֹרֹו

5. Shelah.

וַחֲסָף עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן — *And yet again* [lit. *and she yet added and*], *and she bore a son.*

שֶׁלָּה — *Shelah.*

[Meaning *deceit* or *disappointment*; see below].

וְהָיָה בְּלִדְתָּהּ אֹתוֹ — *And it was in Chezib when she bore him.*

The translation follows *Rambam*. *Rashbam* renders *and he* [i.e., Judah] *was in Chezib when she bore him.*

Chezib was the name of a place [possibly to be identified with the Judean city Achzib mentioned in *Joshua* 15:44 and *Michah* 1:10, or the Achzib in the territory of Asher (*Judges* 21:31) mentioned frequently in the *Talmud* (*Demai* 1:3; *Sheviis* 6:1; *Gittin* 7b (*Yohel Or*)) (*Rashi*).

Rashi finds it difficult, in terms of the simple meaning, that the Torah — which economizes on every word — should, for no apparent reason, tell us the name of the place where this child was born. He therefore suggests that it [i.e. the city] was named Chezib — from *זב* *false*, to *fail* [in the sense of *cease* (cf. *Jer.* 15:18; *Isaiah* 58:2)] — because she ceased bearing. [That is, since Judah's wife was a prominent woman and it was there that she ceased bearing, the site was named Chezib commemorating the *failing* of her ability to bear further children (*Maskil l'David*).]

Rashi draws support for his interpretation from the *Midrash* which comments: 'And she named

him *Shelah*, etc. — she ceased [to bear after this].'

Comp. *Targum Yonasan*: *And she was in cessation when she bore him.*

According to *Radak*: It was customary for the father to name the firstborn, and the mother the second one. Therefore the Torah records that he named the firstborn Er, and she named the second child Onan. The naming of the third child should have been the prerogative of the father, yet the Torah tells us she named him Shelah and explains that this was because he [Judah] *was in Chezib when she gave birth to him*, and was not present to name him. [Similarly, *Da'as Zekeinim*; *B'chor Shor*. *Ramban* disagrees; see below.]

Ramban questions *Rashi's* interpretation that the name Chezib commemorated her ceasing to bear children; having already given birth to three children, her failure to have more was not so tragic that the place had to be named in its memory. Furthermore, how could she have known at the time that she would never have children in the future? [*Mizrachi* defends *Rashi* by offering that with the birth of this third child her physiognomy changed and she ceased ovulating; after having borne three children in rapid succession this was so significant that the place was named to commemorate the event. *Gur Aryeh* suggests that she might have named the place years later after it became apparent that she could no longer give birth.]

Ramban proceeds to cite the view of *Radak* and *Daas Zekeinim* cited above, which he dismisses as being 'without taste or fragrance' [presumably because there is no Biblical support for a father naming a first child and a mother the second. To the contrary, we see that Rachel and Leah named their children

him Shelah; and it was in Chezib when she bore him.
 * Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn. Her name
 was Tamar. ⁷ But Er, Judah's firstborn was evil in the

and those of their maidservants (Oz-naim l'Torah)). He offers that in his opinion the name *Shelah*, like the name *Chezib*, denotes *deceit*. The intent of the passage is that *she named him Shelah* (a name suggested to her by the place where her child was born), *וְהָיָה, because it [not he, but the event] was in Chezib that she bore him.*

According to *Sforno*, the name *Shelah* has a negative connotation and denotes *disappointment*. The passage informs us that she gave him this name since *Judah was in Chezib when the child was born*, and she thereby expressed her disappointment at her husband's absence when she gave birth. Judah would not have agreed to a name with this unpleasant connotation had he returned in time to prevent it.

6. Er marries Tamar.

וַיִּקַּח יְהוּדָה אִשָּׁה לְעֵר בְּכוֹרוֹ — [And] Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn.

Er was very young [about seven years old, according to the chronology in *Seder Olam*] when he married, for all the events related in this chapter transpired, as noted, in the twenty-two years between the sale of Joseph and Jacob's descent to Egypt (*Seder Olam*).

Possibly this is the intent of the phraseology: *Judah took a wife for Er* rather than the usual expression *and he [himself] married* [see v. 2]. Er was still too young to take a woman on his own, so Judah arranged the marriage for him, in keeping with the contemporary custom to marry very young. Apparently when the opportunity arose to marry his son to someone so noble and pure as Tamar [the daughter of Shem; see below] Judah

did not procrastinate, but arranged it immediately (*Daas Soferim*).

וְשָׁמָּה תָּמָר — And her name was Tamar.

As noted, she was not a Canaanite by descent, but the daughter of one of the alien-merchants then living in the land. Far be it that King David [a descendant of Tamar through Peretz (see Ruth 4:15-22)] and the Messiah be of the seed of the accursed Canaan! According to the Sages, Tamar was the daughter of Noah's son Shem, who was a *priest of the most high God* [see *comm.* to 14:18 and *Mizrachi* to 38:24] (*Ramban*, v. 2).

According to the view that Tamar was Shem's daughter, she had to be at least sixty-seven years old when she married the young Er since Shem died in 2158 and Er married in 2225-6. There is another view recorded by *Rashi* to *Sotah* 10a s.v. וְתָמָר that she was not Shem's daughter. *Sefer HaYashar* records a tradition that she was the daughter of Elam, son of Shem. *Mizrachi* to v. 24 similarly cites a view that *daughter* of Shem could mean *granddaughter*.

Judah was intent on assuring abundant progeny for his son, and therefore married him to an older woman. Cf. *Sanhedrin* 104 and *Eicha Rabbosi* that in Jerusalem it was customary to wed a young boy to an older woman to assure many children (*Haamek Davar*).

In *Midrash Lekach Tov* Tamar is praised for her steadfastness in desiring to become associated with the House of Judah.

Tamar's name is mentioned since she was reputed to have been virtuous and righteous. She plays an important role in the narrative that follows and deserves to be identified. Her name in-

וישב
לח/ח-ט

יְהוּדָה רָע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וַיִּמָּתְהוּ יְהוָה:
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה לְאוֹנָן בָּא אֶל-אִשְׁתּוֹ אַחִידָה
ט וַיִּבְּם אֹתָהּ וְהָקָם זָרַע לְאַחִידָה: וַיָּדַע אוֹנָן

dicates that she was as graceful as a *tamar* [palm tree], and extraordinarily beautiful. Her father's name is omitted to emphasize that Judah chose her because of her *own* worth. She was well worthy that the seeds of Israel's later monarchy should sprout from her (*Midrash Hagadol; Alshich; Akeidas Yitzchak*).

7. Er dies.

יְהוּדָה — *Er, Judah's first-born.*

That he was Judah's *firstborn* is repeated to emphasize that Er's sin was judged so severely because he was a potential ancestor of the royal seed. Another, not of Judah's seed, might not have been punished so severely for this level of sinfulness (*Haamek Davar*).

[Comp. footnote next page.]

רָע בְּעֵינֵי ה' — *Was evil in the eyes of HASHEM.*

The nature of Er's evil-doing is not explicitly indicated, unlike the case of his brother [v. 9].

Rashi explains that Er's sin was the same as Onan's [see v. 9] — he wasted his semen. This is deduced from the statement [v. 10] that God *caused him* [Onan] *to die also* — the last word implying *for the same reason* [as Er]. Why did Er destroy his semen? — Tamar was exceedingly beautiful, and he did not want her beauty to be marred by pregnancy. [Cf. *Oznaim l'Torah*.]

Radak deduces this from the phrase *evil in the eyes of HASHEM* — i.e., only in matters revealed to God — viz. in his conjugal relations, destroying his semen so that Tamar

should not conceive.

Ramban does not discuss the nature of Er's sin, but states that the intent of the verse is to inform us that Er's death was in punishment for his *own* sinfulness, not as a punishment for Judah. Judah's efforts to save Joseph's life absolved him for his role in the sale. The righteousness of the Patriarchal family of Jacob was such that none of its members had ever died prematurely due to sin, until the death of Er. This is why Jacob mourned so inconsolably for Joseph [37:34ff] since, besides his love for him, he considered his 'death' to be a punishment intended for him. [Nevertheless, it emerges from the *Talmud* and commentators that though Judah's sons died as a result of their own wickedness, all of these travails befell Judah (i.e. that he had to bury his wife and his children in his lifetime) as a measure of punishment for the anguish he caused his father by his complicity in Joseph's sale. See footnote.]

The *Midrash* notes that names influence man's destiny. Thus, the name ער, Er, is the anagram of רע, evil, and presages his character. Similarly, נח, Noah, read backward is חן, grace. See *Zohar* cited to 6:8, p. 194.

וַיִּמָּתְהוּ ה' — *And HASHEM caused him to die.*

This was the Divine punishment for Onan's destroying his seed and killing the offspring who were to descend from him. This is similar to 4:10 where the phrase *Hark! The bloods* [literal translation] *of your brother cry out to Me* is interpreted to refer both to his blood and the

eyes of HASHEM, and HASHEM caused him to die.

⁸ Then Judah said to Onan. 'Consort with your brother's wife and enter into levirate marriage with her, and establish offspring for your brother.'

blood of his potential descendants (Pesikta).⁽¹⁾

Er was accordingly unworthy to found the royal house of Israel (Alshich).

8. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה לֹאֲנָן — Then [lit. and] Judah said to Onan.

בֹּא אֶל-אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲחִיךָ וְיָבֵם אִתָּה — Consort with your brother's wife and enter into levirate marriage with her.

This is a reference to יָבֵם [yibum], levirate marriage [the term levirate derives from the Latin levir meaning 'brother-in-law'] the details of which are given in Deut. 25:5 ff. Briefly, when a man died without offspring, Torah law obliged his brother to marry the widow, and the son of this union was considered the spiritual son of the deceased. One who refused to perform yibum was considered to be derelict in his duty to the deceased brother. The widow was to loosen his shoe off his foot, spit in front of him, and say, 'So shall be done to the man who does not build

up his brother's house' [ibid. v. 9].⁽²⁾

וְהָקָם וְרָע לְאִחִיךָ — And establish offspring for your brother.

For the son [born of such a union] will be called by the name of the deceased (Rashi).

Ramban disagrees, observing that the seemingly literal implication of Deut. 25:6 notwithstanding, the brother-in-law is not commanded by Halachah to name the offspring of the levirate marriage after his deceased brother [Yevamos 24a]. He cites the example of Boaz's marriage to Ruth, Machlon's widow, which was specifically intended to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his inheritance, that the name of the deceased be not cut off from among his brethren [Ruth 4:10] — yet she named the child Obed [ibid., v. 21] not Machlon. The intent, rather, as noted above, is that the offspring of the yibum union would be spiritually accounted as having been born to the deceased. This is what Naomi's neighbors meant when they exclaimed [ibid. 4:17]: There is a son born to Naomi,

1. The commentators grapple with the problem of how Er and Onan were punished with death for their wickedness at the tender age of seven or eight when it is known that the Heavenly Court does not inflict punishment for sins committed under the age of twenty [see Mizrahi v. 1].

Oznaim l'Torah conjectures that since the tribal ancestors were so wise [לְפָלְגוֹת רָאוּבֵן] they became subject to Divine punishment at an earlier age. However, he prefers the view in Sotah 13a [see v. 12] that Judah's wife and sons died because of his participation in Joseph's sale in which he left his rescue attempt unfinished.

As Maharsha there explains, though Scripture attributes Er and Onan's deaths to their sinfulness, in view of their youth the sinfulness was but a contributing factor; if it had not been for Judah's sin, they would not have been punished.

This is a further reason the Torah emphasizes that Er was Judah's firstborn, as if to imply that it was because of the latter's sinfulness that they died.

2. Ramban notes that the subject of levirate marriage is one of the great mystical doctrines of Torah. [He does not go into detail here, but from Ramban's writing in other areas, the commentators glean that he is referring to the doctrine of the transmigration of souls whereby the

וישוב
 לח/ידיא
 כִּי לֹא לוֹ יִהְיֶה הַזֶּרַע וְהָיָה אִם-בָּא אֶל-
 אִשְׁתּוֹ אָחִיו וְשָׁחַת אֶרְצָה לְבִלְתִּי נָתֹן-
 זֶרַע לְאָחִיו: וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינָיו יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
 וַיָּמָת גַּם-אֹתוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְתָמָר

meaning that she was thereby given back the son Machlon whom she had lost; it explains why they did not say, 'There is a son born to Ruth or Boaz.' This knowledge that the offspring would not be considered his — and not the mere designation of a name — is what troubled Onan to the point that he refused to impregnate her. Furthermore, the mere choice of a name could hardly be enough to deter a sensible person from honoring the memory of his dead brother.

Mizrahi responds to Rambam's arguments. Rashi never meant to say that the new-born child *must* be named after the dead brother; in Deuteronomy 25:6, Rashi says clearly that the Torah's reference to 'name' refers to the disposition of the deceased's *property*, not merely his *appellation*. Rather Rashi's intent in our verse is to explain that ancient *custom* called for naming the new-born son after the dead brother. That such was the common practice is

implied by v. 9: *Onan knew that the seed would not be [considered] his* — unless the child were to be named after Er, in what way would it not be considered Onan's? However, once the Torah prescribed the law of *yibum* (which omits mention of names), the ancient customs lost their validity.

As to Rambam's amazement that so trivial a matter as the giving of a name could have turned Onan to such a sinful course, Mizrahi makes a distinction. When a name is given *voluntarily* in memory of someone, the gesture shows generosity on the part of the parent. But when a father is *forced* to use the name of his dead brother, it becomes a public symbol that the child is not considered his.

HaKsav V'haKabbalah agrees that Rashi refers not to the literal bestowal of a name, but he interprets Rashi differently. Rashi says that the child would be called *על שם הַמֵּת*, which means 'he will be dedicated to the memory of the deceased.' Were Rashi to mean that the child had to be *named* after the

soul of the dead brother would become reincarnated in the child born of the levirate union (see R' Chavel and R' Eisenstadt)].

Even before the giving of the Torah, ancient wise men understood that there was great significance in such a union. The brother of the deceased would take precedence in marrying his widow, and upon his failure to do so it could be performed by his father or any close relation. According to the *Midrash*, Judah was the first one to be involved in the commandment of levirate marriage, the mystical implications of which he learned from his ancestors. Although the ancient custom extended the obligation of levirate marriage to relatives other than the brother of the deceased, under Torah law this was not the case. Only a brother was obligated; other relatives were not. Furthermore, a father-in-law remained forbidden to marry his widowed daughter-in-law even if she was childless.

Only a *brother* could perform *yibum* since the mystical benefits thereof are more inherent in the case of brothers with whom the soul of the deceased finds closer identification than with other relatives.

In ancient Israel, the people perceived the benefits of this union, and established the custom of the closest kin marrying the childless widow of the deceased — providing there was no prohibition against the marriage. Such a marriage could not be termed *yibum* because it did not fall under the command of the Torah; it was given the name *גְּאוּלָּה*, *redemption*, as in the case of Boaz who married Ruth, the widow of his cousin [see Ruth 4:7].

- ⁹ But Onan knew that the seed would not be his.
 So it was, whenever he would consort with his brother's wife, he would let it go to waste on the ground so as not to provide offspring for his brother.
¹⁰ What he did was evil in the eyes of HASHEM, and He caused him to die also.
¹¹ Then Judah said to Tamar, his daughter-in-law,

deceased, the proper expression would have been *בשם המות*.

9. ויָדַע אֹנָן כִּי לֹא לוֹ יִהְיֶה הַזֶּרַע — But [lit. and] Onan knew that the seed would not be [considered] his.

He had some kind of definite knowledge of the mystical significance of *yibum* and he was aware that the resulting offspring of his union — regardless of the actual name given the child — would be an incarnation of his brother's soul. The wicked Onan had no desire of raising a child he did not consider his own (Ramban v. 8, as explained by commentators).

Onan knew that the *mitzvah* of having children would not be his alone, because he was marrying Tamar as an outcome of Tamar's prior betrothal to Er. Thus, it was as if he was sharing his marriage and offspring with Er (*Sforno*).

וְהָיָה אִם-יָבִיא אֶל-אִשְׁתּוֹ אָחִיו וְשָׁחַת אֶרְצָה — So it was, whenever he would consort with his brother's wife, [and] he would let it go to waste on the ground.

He practised *coitus interruptus* — cohabiting naturally but scattering his semen without (*Midrash; Rashi*).

There is, however, an opinion in *Yevamos* 34b that Tamar was still a maiden when Judah later consorted with her and that she conceived from Judah's first intimacy. As the *Gemara* ad. loc. concludes, this opinion

would maintain that Er and Onan practised only unnatural intimacies [שלא כדרךה] with her. [See *Maharsha*.]

The Torah describes Tamar as *אִשְׁתּוֹ אָחִיו*, his brother's wife, although his act of *yibum* made her his legal wife, to emphasize that this was the very reason Onan acted as selfishly as he did (*R' Sheah Brander*).

וְלֹבֵלֵתִי בְּתוּרָתוֹ לְאָחִיו — So as not to provide offspring for his brother.

He begrudged Er the posthumous fulfillment through his *yibum* of the purpose of marriage — begetting children (*Sforno*).

According to *B'chor Shor*: he wanted to avoid the responsibility of raising another's child.

10. וַיַּעַב בְּעֵינֵי ה' אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה — [And] what he did was evil in the eyes of HASHEM.

He misused the organs God gave him for propagating the race to unnaturally satisfy his own lust, and he was therefore deserving of death (*Alshich*; see *Nidah* 13b).

וַיָּמָת וַיָּמָת — And He caused him to die also.

[The connotation of *וַיָּמָת*, also, is explained by *Rashi* in v. 7 s.v. *אֶרְצָה* as implying that both Er and Onan died for a similar sin.]

11. Judah rebuffs Tamar.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה לְתָמָר בְּלֹחַ — Then [lit. and] Judah said to Tamar, his daughter-in-law.

בָּלְתוּ שְׂבִי אֶלְמָנָה בֵּית-אָבִיךָ עַד-יִגְדֶּל־
שְׁלָה בְּנִי כִי אָמַר פְּנֵי-יָמוּת גַּם-הוּא
בְּאֶחָיו וְתִלָּךְ תָּמַר וּתִשָּׁב בֵּית אָבִיהָ:
יב וַיִּרְבוּ הַיָּמִים וְתָמַת בַּת-שׁוּעַ אֵשֶׁת-
יְהוּדָה וַיִּנָּחֻם יְהוּדָה וַיַּעַל עַל-גִּזְוֵי צֵאָנוּ

his brothers (Rashi).
Remain a widow in your father's house.

'Continue conducting yourself as a widow by wearing mourner's garb and not anointing yourself until Shelah grows up. By so doing you will indicate that you do not intend to marry another'. For it was the custom that a widow would indicate her readiness to marry a stranger by removing her mourning garb and arraying herself in scarlet to display that she was no longer in mourning (Ramban).

According to the traditional chronology, Shem, Tamar's father, had died many years earlier [see *comm.* to v. 5 s.v. וַיָּמָה]. Nevertheless the term *father's house* extends even to his heirs (Tosafos, *Eruvin* 15b cited by *Gur Aryeh* to v. 24).

Until my son Shelah grows up.

— I.e., until he reaches thirteen years and a day (*Sechel Tov*) [see *Ramban* below].

For he thought [lit. said (to himself)], Lest he also die like his brothers.

I.e., when Judah made his suggestion that Tamar remain a widow until Shelah grew up he was diplomatically rebuffing her, for as this passage makes clear, he never intended for her to marry his son. He feared that she had established herself as a woman whose husbands die young ['*katlanis*' (see *Kesubos* 43b)] and he was apprehensive that Shelah might die prematurely like

his brothers (Rashi).

Thus Rashi interprets *אמר*, for he thought, as the excuse for asking her to stay as a widow in her father's house, which was merely his way of rebuffing her indefinitely; when Shelah came of age, Judah would have found some other excuse to put off the marriage. The verse should not be understood to mean that Judah *did* want the marriage to take place when Shelah was older but that he wanted a delay of a few years, for if Judah truly thought marriage to her would result in Shelah's death, he had no reason to think that the situation would change in a few years (*Mizrachi*).

Ramban differs and maintains that had Judah been apprehensive that Tamar was a *katlanis* (one whose husbands presumably die young), he would not have found it necessary to resort to putting her off with a feigned promise, but would have forthrightly told her, 'Go in peace from my house since marriage to such a woman would be prohibited to Shelah' [see *Kesubos* 43b. (The *Poskim* discuss whether the prohibition of *katlanis* applies to cases of *yibum*. See *HaKsav V'HaKabbalah* who distinguishes between the case of Tamar and cases after the giving of the Torah)]. To the contrary, Ramban continues, Judah must have known [as Tamar herself knew from their conjugal behavior] that his sons died through their own sins and not because the guiltless Tamar was a *katlanis*. That Judah wanted Tamar to remarry in his family is evident from the fact that he was angered by Tamar's harlotry to the extent of condemning her to be burned [which presumably would not have been his attitude had he intended to be rid of her].

Rather, Judah consented in principle to the marriage, but he was afraid that if

'Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up' — for he thought, 'Lest he also die like his brothers.' — So Tamar went and lived in her father's house.

¹² Many days passed and Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died. When Judah was consoled, he went up to oversee his sheepshearers — he and his Adul-

Shelah married her while he was so young he might have the tendency to sin with her as had his brothers. Therefore, he wanted her to wait until Shelah would mature and be receptive to his father's influence as a deterrent against sin [comp. *Sforno*].

[Conceivably, then, according to *Ramban*, Judah might have even verbalized to Tamar the phrase *lest he also die like his brothers*, which according to *Ramban* was Judah's reason for asking her to wait until Shelah grows up, and not merely thought it to himself.]

Gur Aryeh defends *Rashi's* interpretation that Judah was merely rebuffing Tamar and had no intention of allowing Tamar — whom he feared was a *katlanis* — to become married to Shelah. That Judah wanted her to remain a widow in her father's house, and was so incensed at her later infidelity, was because — in deference to his sons' memory — he did not want her to become married to anyone else.

וַתֵּלֶךְ תָּמָר וַתֵּשֶׁב בֵּית אָבִיהָ — So Tamar went and lived [lit. settled] in her father's house.

— In a display of her loyalty to the tradition and her desire to remain associated with the sacred race. She waited patiently for Shelah to come of age and marry her, and thereby perpetuate her husband's seed (*Ralbag*).

12. וַיִּרְבוּ הַיָּמִים — Many days passed [lit. and the days increased].

Following the Rabbinic chronology in *Seder Olam* (discussed in v. 1), according to which all the events in this chapter transpired in a

twenty-two year period, the phrase *many days passed* is interpreted to indicate the passing of twelve months.

וַתָּמָת בְּתִשּׁוּעַ אֶשְׁתִּיהוּדָה — And Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died.

That Judah's wife and sons died prematurely is, as noted in the comm. and footnote to v. 7, perceived in *Sotah* 13a as punishment for Judah's complicity in the sale of Joseph. He began a good deed of telling his brothers not to kill Joseph, but neglected to follow through. One who abandons a good deed without completing it, the Sages teach, will eventually bury his wife and children, as happened to Judah.

וַיִּנְחָם יְהוָה — When [lit. and] Judah was consoled.

The translation follows *Onkelos* and *Ibn Ezra* who interpret that after Judah was consoled of his wife's death he went up, etc.

According to *Ramban*, the phrase implies: And Judah sought consolation by going up to his sheepshearers.

וַיַּעַל עַל-גִּזְיוֹ עֲאֹנִי — [And] he went up to oversee [lit. upon] his sheepshearers.

I.e., he went up to Timnah to 'stand upon' [i.e., supervise] his sheep-shearers (*Rashi*; see below).

Thus, *Rashi* connects וַיַּעַל, went up, with תִּמְנָה, to Timnah (*Mizrachi*).

וישב לח/יגיד
 יג הוא וְחִירָה רָעָהוּ הָעֶדְלָמִי תִמְנָה: וַיֵּגֶד
 לְתִמְנָה לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה חֲמִיר עֲלֶיהָ תִמְנָה
 יד לָגוֹ צֹאנִי: וְתָסַר בְּגָדֵי אֶלְמְנוֹתָהּ מֵעֶלְיָהּ
 וְתָכַס בְּצַעֲיָהּ וְתִתְעַלֶּף וְתִשָּׁב בְּפֶתַח

Judah would go there regularly in search of consolation; by busying himself with the sheep he would forget his grief. Or possibly since Judah was a prominent man, the shearing of his sheep was a festive occasion accompanied by a public feast for the poor (*Ramban*).

[Comp. *Haamek Davar* cited to 31:19.]

That sheep-shearing was a festive occasion may be seen from the feast Absalom made on such an event [*II Samuel* 13:23], and from the story of Nabal [*I Samuel* 25:2] (*R' Avraham ben HaRamban*).¹¹

The translation of צֹאנִי, lit. upon his sheep-shearers, as connoting 'to stand upon,' i.e. oversee, follows *Rashi*. [Comp. also *Rashi* to 24:30 s.v. [עַל הַגִּמְלִים].

Ibn Ezra interprets עַל, upon, as synonymous in this case with אֶל, to. [Comp. *I Samuel* 1:10 'וְתִתְעַלֶּף עַל ה' (*Yohel Or*)].

HaKsav V'HaKabbalah interprets עַל as meaning concerning — Judah went up to attend to matters concerning the sheep shearing.

He and his Adullamite friend, Hirah. — הוא וְחִירָה רָעָהוּ הָעֶדְלָמִי

It is with his friend and partner that Judah seeks this consolation as he travels the distance to Timnah (*Abarbanel*).

תִּמְנָה — To Timnah.

Presumably this is the Timnah mentioned in *Joshua* 15:57, a town several miles south of Hebron. It is logical that Judah remained in the same general area of Eretz Yisrael as the rest of Jacob's family, even though he found it necessary to move away from his brothers.

[It is noteworthy that *Onkelos* here and *Targum* to *Judges* 14:1 renders the name of the town as Timnas, while in *Joshua*, *Targum* renders Timnah. This apparent inconsistency may be related to the controversy cited below.]

The Talmud (*Sotah* 10a) and *Midrash* note a dispute concerning the identity of the town. According to one view, there were two towns named Timnah, one where Judah settled and the other, mentioned in *Judges*, where Samson married. Samson's Timnah has been located by some as near Beth Shemesh on the northern border of Judah.

The second view is that there was only one Timnah in Eretz Yisrael. If so, the Talmud inquiries, how is it that Judah is described as going up to Timnah, [indicating it was on a mountain while Samson is described as descending to Timnah indicating it was in a valley]? The Talmud gives two responses:

— The 'ascent' and 'descent' are meant figuratively. Judah was 'elevated' in Timnah because it was there that Tamar conceived from him, giving birth to Peretz, the forerunner of the Davidic

1. The *Midrash* observes how every case of sheep shearing in Scripture left its mark [i.e., it had evil consequences].

We find this in the case of Nabal, Laban, and Absalom. [Jacob fled from Laban while the latter was shearing his sheep (30:19); this ultimately led to Laban's pursuit and confrontation with Jacob, a confrontation which led to Jacob's curse (31:32) to which Rachel's death is directly ascribed. Nabal's death followed his sheep shearing (*I Samuel* 25:4-8). Absalom's sheep shearing was the scene of Amnon's assassination (*II Sam.* 13:23 ff).]

38 lamite friend, Hirah — to Timnah.

13-14 ¹³ And Tamar was told as follows, 'Behold, your father-in-law is coming up to Timnah for the sheepshearing.' ¹⁴ So she removed her widow's garb from upon her, covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself up. She then sat by the crossroad

dynasty. Samson, on the other hand, 'descended' in Timnah because there he suffered the disgrace of marrying a Philistine woman.

— Timnah was situated on a mountainside between Samson's home in the mountainous north and Judah's home in low-lying Hebron. Thus, Judah's route to Timnah was uphill while Samson's was downhill. *Rashi* to v. 13 cites this view.

According to *Abarbanel*, the term *went up* is used here because Timnah is to the north of Adullam, and one is therefore said to 'go up' from Adullam to Timnah.

13. וַיָּגֵד לְתָמָר — And Tamar was told [lit. and it was told to Tamar].

— Through a prophetic spirit (*Midrash HaGadol*).

Cf. *Alshich*: A prophetic message from the Academy of Shem and Eber was revealed to her: תָּמָר עוֹלָה, 'your father-in-law is 'going up' — his time has come to 'ascend' great heights and beget the Messiah.

According to the simple sense it was not necessarily through a prophetic vision. Since Judah was such an important personage, his travel plans — especially to something as festive as a sheep-shearing — would be common knowledge and she was told of it by one of the townsfolk (*Ibn Caspi*).

She was told either that Judah went to Timnah regularly, and she waited for him on one of those days; or as noted, that he *would* be going there for some specific occasion, and she made plans to await him on that particular day (*Ramban* v. 12).

14. Tamar disguises herself. It is

her intention to force Judah himself to perform the levirate duty.

וַתִּסְרֹף אֶלְמִנוּתָהּ מֵעָלֶיהָ — So [lit. and] she removed her widow's garb from upon her.

וַתִּכְסֶּה בַצִּיצִיף וַתַּעֲלֶה — [And] covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself up.

In addition to wearing a veil, she covered her face so well that he would be unable to recognize her. [That she did so is indicated by v. 15 which says clearly that he could not recognize her for that reason (*Mizrachi*)] (*Rashi*).

According to *Ramban*, she acted in the manner of harlots who partially wrap themselves in a veil, leaving portions of their hair and face — eyes, mouth, and neck — uncovered, to allow them to entice passersby.

The sense of וַתַּעֲלֶה [lit. and wrapped herself up] as meaning hid her face with a garment, follows *Rashi*. *Ibn Ezra* interprets the verb similarly, which agrees with his rendering of the word וַתַּעֲלֶה in *Jonah* 4:8. Most others render the term in *Jonah* *ibid.* as *swoon*; *faint*, which is how *Ibn Caspi* perceives the word in our passage: i.e. she covered herself with a veil, and when she saw Judah approaching pretended to swoon in a feminine manner to draw his attention.

Tzror HaMor also interprets the word as *swoon*, but writes that Tamar indeed felt faint at the overwhelming implications of what she was about to do. But it was a matter of survival and she proceeded with the task at hand.

עֵינִים אֲשֶׁר עַל-דֶּרֶךְ תִּמְנָה כִּי רָאָתָה
בִּי-גִדְלָה שְׁלָה וְהוּא לֹא-יִנְתְּנָהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה:
טו וַיִּרְאָה יְהוּדָה וַיַּחֲשֹׁבָה לְזוֹנָה כִּי בִסְתָה
טז פָּנֶיהָ: וַיֵּט אֵלֶיהָ אֶל-הַדֶּרֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הִבָּה

וַחֲשֹׁב בִּפְתַח עֵינִים אֲשֶׁר עַל-דֶּרֶךְ תִּמְנָה
— *She then sat by the crossroad which is on the road toward Timnah.*

— It was the practise of harlots to sit at a crossroad where they would be seen by many people (*Ramban*).

The term *בִּפְתַח עֵינִים* literally means *at the opening of eyes*. It refers to a *crossroad* — the juncture where travelers 'open their eyes' to determine in which direction to proceed. According to the Sages [*Sotah* 10b], the term refers figuratively to the *entrance* [פֶּתַח] of Abraham's home [or sepulchre (*Mizrachi*); or *Eishel* (*Chem'as HaChermidah*)] — a place to which all eyes turned. [She sat there because everyone traveling along that road visited Abraham's residence, and Judah, too, was certain to do so] (*Rashi*).^[1]

Ralbag interprets it as open area which provided an unobstructed view of all travelers. According to *Ibn Ezra* עֵינִים is the plural of עַיִן, *fountain*. There were two fountains on the road which formed a gate, as it were, through which Judah had to pass.

According to another view in *Sotah* *ibid.*, the phrase means the *entrance* of *Enayim*, *Enayim* being the name of a place, identical with *Enam* mentioned in *Joshua* 15:34. *Yohel Or* elaborates that *Enam* was located near *Tzar'ah* [*ibid.* v. 33] which in turn was near *Timnah* [*ibid.* 19:41-43]. *Enam* was similarly near *Adullam*, *Hirah's* home.

1. The phraseology of this passage implies a deeper insight: When Tamar set herself there for her noble purpose, it was *בְּעֵינִים פְּתוּחוֹת*, *with open eyes* — she fully perceived the Providential chain of events that would proceed from her action: that she would become the ancestress of the royal House of David (*Chiddushei HaRim*).

2. The Talmud (*Nazir* 23b) teaches: Ulla said, Tamar [v. 18] and Zimri [*Numb.* 25:14] both lived with people outside of wedlock. From Tamar's harlotry kings and prophets descended [because she had lofty moral intentions, acting for the Sake of Heaven to raise up righteous progeny (*Rashi* ad. loc. and to *Horayos* 10b)], while Zimri's immorality resulted in the downfall of myriads of Israel [*ibid.* v. 9]. R' Nachman bar Yitzchak [referring to Tamar] said, Greater is a transgression committed for the sake of Heaven [לְשֵׁקָה] than a *mitzvah* committed with an ulterior motive [see *Overview*].

According to the dialogue recorded in *Sotah* 10a [cited in v. 15 s.v. וַיֵּט], the expression *פֶּתַח עֵינִים* figuratively alludes to the manner in which Tamar 'gave eyes to her words' [i.e. gave an 'opening' (=credibility) to her response (*Daas Zekeinim*)], by offering convincing replies to Judah's questions regarding her status.

כִּי רָאָתָה בִּי-גִדְלָה שְׁלָה וְהוּא לֹא-יִנְתְּנָהּ
לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה — *For she saw that Shelah had grown, and she had not been given to him as a wife.*

The Torah thus explains why Tamar took so undignified an initiative in offering herself to Judah. She was determined to have children from him. [Since it could not be through Shelah, she had no alternative but that it be from Judah himself (*Gur Aryeh*)] (*Rashi*).^[2]

Following *Rashi's* implication in v. 11: She realized that Judah had merely been rebuffing her and had no real intention of ever allowing Shelah to marry her.

Ramban *ibid.*: It was Judah's intention for Shelah to marry Tamar after he grew up; however, in Judah's eyes Shelah was still a child since he was not yet ten years old and Judah was determined to have him wait longer. To Tamar it appeared that Shelah was already old

38 which is on the road toward Timnah, for she saw that
15-16 Shelah had grown, and she had not been given to him
 as a wife.

¹⁵ When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a
 harlot since she had covered her face. ¹⁶ So he
 detoured to her by the road and said, 'Come, if you

enough [her first husbands, as
 noted, were but seven years old at
 marriage.] She craved greatly to
 give birth from the sacred family,
 and hurried to do this deed.

Her initial intent had been that
 Judah would see her without her
 widow's garb and question her
 motive. She would then tell him
 that he had bidden her to wear her
 mourning clothes only until Shelah
 grew up; now that he was old
 enough, she no longer had to re-
 main a widow. But the dialogue did
 not occur that way for he did not
 recognize her (*Sforno*).

As *B'chor Shor* explains, Tamar
 was justified in contriving to have
 Judah perform the levirate marriage
 for [as *Ramban* writes in *v. 8*]
 before the Torah was given levirate
 marriage was performed by any
 close relative — even the father of
 the deceased. Since Shelah had not
 done so, it was Judah's respon-
 sibility to do so.

15 וַיִּרְאֶה יְהוּדָה וְנִחְשְׁבָה לְוֹנָה —
 When [lit. and] Judah saw her,
 [and] he thought her to be a harlot.

— Because she was sitting at the
 crossroads (*Rashi*).

[Harlotry was not prohibited
 before the Torah was given; see
 footnote next verse.]

According to the *Midrash* [see
 next verse] when Judah initially saw
 her he reasoned: 'She is a harlot;' he
 paid her no attention, and

proceeded on his way.

כִּי כִסְתָה פָּנֶיהָ — Since she had,
 covered her face.

— And he could not recognize
 her. [This phrase anticipates why —
 as the next verse states — Judah did
 not recognize Tamar (*Tzeidah La-
 Derech*)]. The Rabbis [in *Sotah* 10a,
 who interpret a covered face as a
 sign of modesty — not harlotry] ex-
 plain that our phrase is to be
 rendered in the past-perfect: *Since
 she had covered her face* all the
 while she had lived in her father-in-
 law's home, Tamar had earned a
 reputation as a modest woman,
 above suspicion. Therefore, Judah
 never thought to connect her with
 this 'harlot' (*Rashi*).

16 וַיֵּט אֵלֶיהָ אֶל־הַדֶּרֶךְ — So [lit.
 and] he detoured to her by the road.

— I.e. he left his path to go to her.
 In old French: *detourner* (*Rashi*).

According to the *Midrash* [see *v.*
 15], Providence forced Judah to
 detour to her:

Judah had ignored her and
 proceeded on his way, but Tamar
 prayed: 'Sovereign of the Uni-
 verse: Shall I be deprived of off-
 spring from this righteous man?'
 Then God sent the Angel of Desire
 to appear before Judah and say to
 him: 'Where are you going Judah?
 If you flee, from where will kings
 arise? From where else will
 redeemers arise?' So Judah *detoured
 to her by the road* — despite himself

נָא אָבּוֹא אֵלַיךְ בִּי לֹא יָדַע בִּי כְלָתוֹ הוּא
וּתְאָמַר מִה־תִּתֶּן־לִי בִּי תְבוֹא אֵלַי:
וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֲשַׁלַּח גְּדִי־עֹזִים מִן־הַצֹּאֵן
וּתְאָמַר אִם־תִּתֶּן עָרְבוֹן עַד שְׁלָחָה:

וישב
לח/י

and against his wish (*Tanchuma Yashan; Midrash; see Moreh Nevuchim 2:6*).⁽¹⁾

הָבֵהנָא אָבּוֹא אֵלַיךְ – *Come, if you please, let me [lit. and I will] consort with you.*⁽²⁾

The term הָבֵה [come], signifies an invitation to another to *prepare oneself and one's mind for something*. It always has this meaning unless the context requires the translation *give*. Indeed, even in contexts where the term means *prepare* the word is closely related to the

1. The Talmud [*Sotah 10a*] records the following dialogue between Judah and Tamar:

'Are you perhaps a pagan?' Judah asked her.

'I am a proselyte,' she answered, [and do not worship idols (*Rashi* in *Sotah* ad. loc.)].

'Are you married?'

'I am unmarried' [and permissible to any man (*Rashi, ibid.*)].

'Perhaps your father accepted betrothals on your behalf?'

'No. I am an orphan [and have no father. My mother and brothers married me off as a minor (*Rashi, ibid.*)].

[The Rabbis provided that a girl with no father could be betrothed by her mother and brothers while she is still a minor. However, she retains the right to renounce the marriage until she attains her majority. By her statements to Judah, she expressed her opposition to the marriages – כּוֹסֵת, refusal. As a result, her marriages to Er and Onan were invalid retroactively and she was not prohibited to Judah as his daughter-in-law. This interpretation, that Tamar was a minor when she was married to Er and Onan would differ from the Midrashic tradition (cited by *Rashi* in v. 24) that Tamar was the daughter of Shem, since, as noted in v. 6, Shem had died at least sixty-seven years before Tamar married Er (*Rashi, ibid.*).]

[*Maharsha* differs with *Rashi* and reconciles the tradition that Tamar was Shem's daughter. Since Judah was unaware that Tamar was his daughter-in-law, his innocent intent in his question was 'Perhaps your father accepted betrothals on your behalf – while you were still a minor and without your knowledge. If so, are you not free to marry any man?' To which Tamar replied, 'I am an orphan. My father [Shem] died while my mother was pregnant, and he could certainly not have accepted betrothal on my behalf before I was born.'

The Talmudic dialogue continues: 'Perhaps you are [menstrually] unclean?' Judah asked.

– 'I am clean.'

2. The moral perspective of Judah's action.

Judah's action must be viewed in the moral perspective of ancient times – before the Torah was given – when harlotry was not yet forbidden. All morality depends on the Torah. Had the Torah not forbade certain forbidden foods, we would be able to enjoy them guiltlessly. The same is true of harlotry: before the Torah was given it was simply not prohibited.

As *Rambam* writes in *Ishus 1:4*: 'Before the Torah was given, if a man met a woman in the market place and desired her, if she consented he would pay her hire and consort with her at the crossroads, and go his way. [The incident of Judah and Tamar corroborates this (*Maggid Mishnah*).] She is what is known as a קְדֻשָּׁה, prostitute. When the Torah was given, prostitution was prohibited, [see *comm.* to *Deut.* 23:18]. See also *Moreh Nevuchim 3:49*].

That the Patriarchs – and presumably their families – observed the Torah before it was given is no contradiction. They observed it *voluntarily* and Judah was not obligated to go beyond what was absolutely *required* of him. [Cf. the case of Jacob marrying two sisters which later Torah law absolutely forbade (see *comm.* to 26:5; 32:5; footnote to 35:19).]

Also, the direct hand of Providence must not be ignored in this case, as discussed in the *Overview*, and the *Overview* to *Ruth*. For as the *Midrash* notes, Providence caused Judah to be virtually coerced by an angel [i.e. caused Judah's passions to be enflamed (*Rambam*). See also *Or HaChaim* to 49:9.]

please, let me consort with you,' for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, 'What will you give me if you consort with me?'

¹⁷ He replied, 'I will send you a kid of the goats from the flock.'

And she said, 'Provided you leave a pledge until you send it.'

meaning of give (Rashi).

— *For he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law.*

— Even after he approached her; otherwise he would have spoken with her on behalf of Shelah. That Judah could not recognize her was part of the Divine plan. God wanted the seed of the Messianic dynasty to come directly from Judah — who was more righteous and pure than Shelah — and Tamar (Sforno).

Once Judah concluded that she was a harlot, he did not recognize her by her voice, since it never occurred to him that his highly prominent daughter-in-law, Tamar, could be a harlot, God forbid. Thus her voice did not arouse his suspicions just as Jacob's voice did not arouse Isaac's suspicions once the Patriarch felt Jacob's 'hairy arms' and concluded he was Esau (Haamek Davar).

— *What will you give me if you consort with me?*

Tamar initiated the conversation with the intention that Judah would recognize her by her voice. She certainly did not seek any harlot's fee, it being her intention to establish offspring from Judah. Therefore, she wanted a *pledge*, not for personal gain, but as proof of her real intentions. Had he given her a *fee* she would not have taken it, for

then she would have no proof of her righteous intention (Sforno).

17. *אָנֹכִי אֶשְׁלַח גִּידִים מִן־הָצֹאן — I will send you a kid of the goats from the flock.*

In general, a gift of a kid was considered quite honorable. Jesse sent a kid with David to Saul [I Sam. 16:20], and Samson brought a kid when he visited his wife [Judges 15:1] (HaRechasim leBik'ah).

From the specific qualification that it would be a 'kid of the goats,' the Sages (Chullin 113a) derive that whenever the term *גִּידִי*, *kid*, occurs without the limitation *הַיְּדִים*, *of the goats*, it halachically includes the young of the cow and ewe. [See Torah Temimah].

The pronoun *אָנֹכִי*, as distinct from *אֲנִי* has an emphatic connotation. In this case it implies 'As for me — i.e. a man of my worth — it is sufficient that I send you a kid from the flocks.' For a harlot's fee is often established by a man's prominence — the lowly usually paying a higher fee while the mere interest of an important person has independent value to a harlot. Tamar agreed that for a man of Judah's prominence a kid would suffice, but cleverly requested a *pledge* (Haamek Davar).

— *And she said, 'Provided [lit. if] you leave [lit. give] a pledge until you send it.'*

As noted earlier, Tamar was not interested in the harlot's fee, but in securing something she could use as later proof of her intention. She

וישב יח לח/יחכא
 ויאמר מה הערבון אשר אתן-לך
 ותאמר חתמך ופתילך ומטהך אשר
 בידך ויתן-לה ויבא אליה ותהר לו:
 יט ותקם ותלך ותסר צעיפה מעליה
 כ ותלבש בגדי אלמנותה: וישלח יהודה
 את-גדי העזים ביד רעהו העדלמי
 לקחת הערבון מיד האשה ולא מצאה:
 כא וישאל את-אנשי מקמה לאמר איה
 הקדשה הוא בעינים על הדרך ויאמרו

therefore consented to consort with Judah only on condition that he leave her a pledge (*Sforno*).

18. חתמך ופתילך ומטהך אשר בידך — 'Your signet, your wrap, and your staff that is in your hand.'

She selected the three articles which most distinguished him as a ruler or lord (*Ramban*), in order to inspire her to contemplate about Judah's greatness [thereby elevating her spiritual level while she carried the child] (*Sforno*). Furthermore, such distinctive articles would provide indisputable proof of the identity of the child's father.

The translation *your signet and your wrap* follows *Onkelos*: עוקתך ושושיפך; the ring which you use as a seal and the garment with which you cover yourself (*Rashi*).

Ramban differs with *Rashi*'s suggestion that Judah would have left Tamar his *wrap* and gone from Tamar in a state of partial undress. Rather, *Ramban* maintains that by the Aramaic שושיפך, *Onkelos* referred to a small shawl which distinguished persons would spread over their headcoverings. It was called פתיל, [literally *fringe* as in *Numbers* 15:38], because it was as short as a fringe. For in only one instance [*Deut.* 22:17] does *Onkelos* render the Hebrew שְׂמֹלָה, [cloak], as שושיפך, and in that case it means the scarf known in the Talmud as *sudar*.

Alternately *Ramban* suggests that Judah possessed a signet impressed with the form

of a lion, as rulers do; fringed cords woven into the same design as his signet; and a rod symbolic of a royal sceptre. It was these that he gave to Tamar.

Rashbam renders פתיל as *belt*, while *Ralbag* perceives it as an ornamental braided cord worn by distinguished personages on their outer garments, or as an adornment on their head-dress (cf. *Haamek Davar*). Others suggest that the signet was suspended from a פתיל, *fringed cord*. According to *Abarbanel*, it referred to Judah's fringed handkerchief.

The signet ring was engraved with the Ineffable Four Letter Name — HASHEM ... The staff was the one which Jacob carried when he left home [see 32:11] (*Yalkut Shimoni*).

... Moreover, this rod was the one with which Moses would later split the Sea and perform all the miracles (*Baal HaTurim*).

ויתן לה — [And] he gave [them] to her.

So great was the passion burning within him [as a result of the Providential intervention (*Abarbanel*)] that Judah gave these three valuable items as a pledge for a single goat (*Ibn Ezra*).

Rashbam interprets to the contrary. Judah gladly parted with these items since they were *not* indispensable articles of clothing.

ותהר לו — And she conceived by [lit. to] him.

From the first intimacy. Although it is axiomatic that a

- ¹⁸ And he said, 'What pledge shall I give you?'
 She replied, 'Your signet, your wrap, and your staff that is in your hand.' And he gave them to her. He consorted with her and she conceived by him.
¹⁹ Then she arose, left, and removed her veil from upon her. She put on her widow's garb.
²⁰ Judah sent the kid of the goats through his friend the Adullamite to retrieve the pledge from the woman. But he did not find her. ²¹ He inquired of the people of her place, 'Where is the prostitute, the one at the crossroads by the road?' And they said, 'There

maiden does not conceive from the first intimacy, Tamar had made special preparations rendering it possible (Yevamos 34b; comp. the cases of Lot's daughters in 19:36, Hagar in 16:4, and Leah in 29:32 and 49:2).

[This follows the view in Yevamos ibid. (cited in v. 9) that Tamar was still a maiden when Judah consorted with her, for Er and Onan had indulged only in unnatural intimacies with her. Rashi, in his exposition to v. 9 does not follow this view, following instead the Midrash that Er and Onan had practised *coitus interruptus* and Tamar was no longer a maiden. He therefore does not find it noteworthy that she conceived from this union. It was not her first natural intimacy with a man.]

The phraseology *וַתֵּהָרֵג*, and she conceived to him [rather than simply *וַתֵּהָרֵג* or *וַתֵּהָרֵג* (Mizrachi)] connotes that she conceived progeny who were similar in stature to him: strong and righteous like Judah (Rashi).

¹⁹ *וַתֵּהָרֵג* — Then she arose and left [lit. and went].

She arose — spiritually, for kings and prophets were to result from this union (*Lekach Tov*; comp. Rashi to 23:17 s.v. *וַיֵּקֶם שָׂדֵה עֶפְרָיִם*).

וַתֵּהָרֵג — And she put on her widow's garb.

For now that she had acquired the longed-for seed she had no more desire to marry (Sforno).

20. Judah dispatches his Adullamite friend to redeem the pledge.

בְּיַד רֵעֵהוּ הָעֲדֻלְמִי — Through [lit. in the hand of] his friend the Adullamite.

— There is a difference of opinion recorded in *Bereishis Rabbasi* regarding why the Adullamite's name is not recorded here. According to one view, his anonymity was preserved in deference to his selflessness in performing this shameful mission out of love and friendship for the righteous Judah. According to another view, his name is omitted as token of rebuke, because he undertook to participate in this disgraceful affair.

לְקַחַת הַקֶּבֶץ — To retrieve [lit. take] the pledge.

— And thereby keep his promise regarding the kid (Malbim).

וְלֹא מָצָא — But he [i.e. his friend] did not find her.

21. *אֵיזָה הַקְדֻשָּׁה* — Where is the prostitute?^[1]

1. R' Shmelke of Nicholsburg commented homiletically:

אֵיזָה קְדֻשָּׁה, where does harlotry originate? הֵיאָה קְדֻשָּׁה, it is in the eyes! (Peninei Torah).

וישב כב לא־היתה בזה קדשה: וישב אל־יהודה
 לח/כב־ג ויאמר לא מצאתיה וגם אנשי המקום
 אמרו לא־היתה בזה קדשה: ויאמר כב
 יהודה תקח־לה פן נהיה לבז הזה
 שלחתי הגדי הזה ואמה לא מצאתה:

[The term קדשה derives from the root קדש which in its most literal sense denotes *dedication to a specific purpose*; it refers to a woman who *by profession* acts licentiously and is dedicated [מקדשת] and known to be available for prostitution (see *Rashi* here, *Ibn Ezra* to *Deut.* 23:18, and *Ibn Ezra* to *Haggai* 2:12. Comp. also *R' Hirsch* to 2:30 who distinguishes between the spellings קדוש which refers to the 'unresisting acquiescence to everything noble,' and קדש, the opposite, 'complete acquiescence in sensuality'; cf. כבוד denoting spiritual contentment, and כבד, the material [see 31:1]; שלום, spiritual harmony, and שלם material totality). As *Rambam* notes in *Ishus* 1:4] (cited above in the footnote to v. 16) in pre-Mosaic times there was absolutely no prohibition in harlotry; it first became prohibited when the Torah was given, as set forth in *Deut.* 23:18.]

[The terms וונה and קדשה, meaning *harlot* or *prostitute* are used interchangeably. They do not represent two different categories nor is there any Halachic distinction between the two. Although the modern secularist Bible exegetes distinguish between the Hebrew terms for harlot וונה and קדשה by interpreting that the latter term refers to 'cult' prostitutes who, according to them, used to minister in Canaanite heathen temples, this interpretation has no basis in classical Biblical exegesis and certainly is not halachically valid. Halachically, it is clear that the prohibition of harlotry in general (not just of some supposed cult prostitution!) derives from *Deut.* 23:18, and the *Poskim* use the terms וונה and קדשה interchangeably. See

specifically *Midrash Tannaim* cited in *Torah Sheleimah* 888.]

— The one [lit. she] at the crossroads [lit. by the eyes] by the road?

[What had probably occurred was that Judah had originally asked Tamar where in that area she lived so he could send her the kid and redeem his pledge. When he sent the Adullamite to the place she told him, and could not find a prostitute there, he inquired of the local residents: 'The prostitute — the one who was stationed yesterday at the crossroads and who supposedly lives in this neighborhood. — Do you know where she is?']

— ויאמרו לא היתה בזה קדשה — *And they said, 'There was no prostitute here'* [lit. in this, Cf. מזה in 37:17].

— There has never been a harlot here; in this place we are scrupulous regarding immorality (*Shochar Tov*).

The deeper intent of their reply was: 'There was no act of harlotry committed here.' They prophesied and knew not what they prophesied (*Minchah Belulah*).

22. — וגם אנשי המקום אמרו — [And] even the local men [lit. men of the place] said.

— In derision; ridiculing your honor (*Sforno*).

23. — תקח לה פן נהיה לבז — *Let her keep them* [lit. let her take to herself], lest we become a laughing stock.

38 was no prostitute here.’²² So he returned to Judah
22-23 and said, ‘I did not find her; even the local men said,
 “There was no prostitute here.”’²³ So Judah said,
 ‘Let her keep them, lest we become a laughing stock. I
 really sent her this kid, but you could not find her.’

Let her keep the signet, wrap, and staff she is holding as a pledge. If you continue searching for her, the matter [of our being taken in by this woman who fled with my pledge (*Nachalas Yitzchak*)] will become generally known, much to our disgrace. What more must I do to verify my word [that I would redeem my pledge by sending her the kid]? (*Rashi*).

According to *Ibn Ezra*: lest we become a laughing stock — for having pledged things as valuable as a signet, wrap and staff for such a trifle.

Or, according to *Abarbanel*: for inquiring about harlots.

Judah's fear was not that he would be ridiculed for purchasing the services of a harlot. Were that his concern, Hirah would not have made public inquiries about her whereabouts (*Nachlas Yitzchak*).

We will be a laughing stock — since matters of sexual intimacy, even those of a permitted nature, are a cause of embarrassment to distinguished people when they become a subject of public

discussion (*R' Avraham ben HaRambam* in *Rambam's* name).¹¹

הנה שלחתי הגדי הזה ואתה לא מצאתה — I really [idiomatically: behold I] sent her this kid, but you could not find her.

I.e. I scrupulously fulfilled my commitment to her and sent her the kid. That you could not find her is a sign that she should keep the pledge (*Ibn Ezra*). [See footnote].

The *Midrash* notes that because Judah deceived his father by means of a kid — having dipped Joseph's tunic in its blood [37:31] — he was himself deceived through one (*Rashi*).

Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:49) derives an important lesson in ethics from Judah's remark. By stressing that he sent her this kid, he was displaying his gift as if to say the he had sent her a choice animal and made a sincere attempt to keep his word. Although he had made no promise regarding the quality of the kid, he was careful not to defraud her. [See footnote.]

1. Judah's decision to forfeit his pledge rather than engage in further discussion of the Tamar matter provides a lesson in moral conduct.

As stated above, harlotry was not forbidden prior to the giving of the Torah. Furthermore, it is obvious that the personal articles Judah had left Tamar as a pledge were far more valuable than the kid he had promised to send her and which Hirah had brought in order to redeem this signet, wrap, and staff. Nevertheless, to discuss sexual matters in public — even if they involve no forbidden conduct — is shameful and should be avoided. Judah was ready to forfeit his important pledge rather than become involved in further public discussion of the topic (*Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim* 3:49).

¶ Judah said ‘we’ will be a laughing stock, in the plural, as if to include Hirah the Adullamite who had no part in the escapade with Tamar. As the saying goes, ‘If you show me someone's friends, I will tell you what he is like.’ Were Judah to become the butt of ridicule, his friend Hirah would become a laughing stock, too (*Midrash*).

וַיֵּשֶׁב | בְּמִשְׁלַשׁ חֳדָשִׁים וַיֵּגֶד לַיהוּדָה
לֵאמֹר זָנִיתָ תִּמְרָךְ כָּלִיתָ וְגַם הִנֵּה הָרָה
לְזָנוֹנִים וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה הוֹצִיָּאוּהָ וּתְשָׁרֶף:

24. Judah is informed of Tamar's 'trespass.'

וַיְהִי בְּמִשְׁלַשׁ חֳדָשִׁים [And] about three months passed.

And her pregnancy became recognizable (*Abarbanel*).

[Not three full months, but] the greater parts of the first and third, and the entire middle [second] one (*Rashi* from *Yevamos* 43a).

In interpreting that Tamar's pregnancy became noticeable in *about*, but not after a full, three months, *Rashi* bases himself on *Niddah* 8a and the Midrash which state that in the case of a full-term, nine-month pregnancy, the presence of the fetus becomes recognizable after three months [a trimester]. Since Tamar's twins were born after only seven months [see *Rashi* to v. 27] her pregnancy would be noticeable after a third of her abbreviated term, as *Rashi* puts it, the full second month and most of the first and third (*Mizrachi*; cf. *Levush*; *Sanhedrin* 69a).¹¹

Rashi could have simplified his comment by saying 'two and a third months' instead of the more cumbersome 'greater parts of the first and third and all of the second months.' He based his interpretation on the Torah's term *בְּמִשְׁלַשׁ*, literally at the tripling, or trimester [see below]. The expression implies that the three months were of roughly equal length, a phenomenon that occurred since the majority of a month can be regarded as a full month (*Mizrachi* cf. *Gur Aryeh*).

An illustration of *Rashi's* interpretation would be that Tamar conceived on the tenth

of Nissan. Thus, the major part of Nissan passed; the whole of Iyar, and the major part of Sivan — when Judah was informed on the twentieth of Sivan (*Sefer Zikaron*).

The translation 'about three months passed' captures the sense of the passage. *Rashi* [as explained by *Mizrachi* and *Dikdukei Rashi*] takes the word *בְּמִשְׁלַשׁ* in the infinitive sense with the temporal כ prefixed: And it came to pass at the tripling of the months, i.e., when the months became three, or when the months were about equally tripled [=trimester]. *Onkelos* renders similarly with the word *בְּתִלְוֹתָא* which is the infinitive of the verb *תָּלַח*. *Rashi* regards the word *מִשְׁלַח*, sending [*Esther* 9:19] as another example of an infinitive construction with a מ preformative.

וַיֵּגֶד לַיהוּדָה — And Judah was told [lit. and it was told to Judah].

The word *וַיֵּגֶד*, was told, is spelled defectively [instead of וַיִּגְדַּל]. According to *Midrash Sechel Tov* this intimates that the information was given 'defectively' — with malice and spite.

Tamar's pregnancy was a subject of boasting by Tamar herself. The *Midrash* records that she would go to the bathhouse and boast: 'Prophets and Redeemers will descend from me!'

וְגַם הִנֵּה הָרָה לְזָנוֹנִים — And moreover, she has conceived by harlotry.

The fact that she is pregnant is conclusive proof that she indeed played the harlot (*Rashbam*).

— And what is more, she didn't even attempt to hide her shame to protect your honor! (*Sforzo*).

1. [When halachic considerations are involved, we follow the majority of women who carry a full nine-month term, and whose pregnancy can be ascertained conclusively three months after conception. This halachah applies to widows or divorcees who may not remarry until a total of ninety-one days have elapsed and it can be definitely established that they are not pregnant from their first husbands (*Toah Temimah*).]

²⁴ About three months passed, and Judah was told,
 'Your daughter-in-law has committed harlotry, and
 moreover she has conceived by harlotry.' Judah said,
 'Take her out and let her be burned!'

The word לְזָנוּת, by harlotry, is in the plural intimating that the rumor was that Tamar's pregnancy was the result of repeated immorality. Those who engage in harlotry usually take precautions against conception; it was considered highly unlikely, therefore that Tamar could have become pregnant through an isolated incident (*Haamek Davar*).

Daas Zekeinim discusses why they made two charges: that Tamar had been guilty of immoral behavior and that 'furthermore she was pregnant by harlotry.' Possibly, acts of immorality were not punished in those times unless they resulted in pregnancy; and possibly [as the plural term לְזָנוּת denotes] they were punished only when harlotry was committed with more than one person.

The word הָרָה [with the accent on the second syllable, as in our passage] is an adjective, as in *Exod. 21:22*: אִשָּׁה הָרָה, pregnant woman. [Had the accent been on the first syllable, it would be a verb: she has conceived] (*Rashi*).

- וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה - [And] Judah said.

According to *Tanchuma Yashan* a tribunal consisting of Isaac, Jacob and Judah sat in judgment on Tamar. The verdict was stated in the name of the junior member, Judah, since it was an erroneous [or condemnatory; Hebrew קִלְקֵלָה (see *Torah Sheleimah* 898)] judgment.

R' David Cohen notes that the attribution of the judgment to Judah could be in consonance with the Talmudic dictum that the discussion of capital cases always begins with the youngest member of the court (*Sanhedrin* 36a). [This was done to avoid a situation where a senior member would rule for

conviction and younger judges would be reluctant to disagree out of respect for his superior wisdom.]

וְהוֹצִיאוּהָ וְתַשְׂרֶף - Take her out and let her be burned!

Rashi cites the Midrash: "Ephraim 'maksha'ah' [so called because he was a scholar with great ability to debate (מְקַשֵּׁה הַלְבוֹת)]; or because he was a watchman of a cucumber (קִישׁוּאִין) field (*Rashi* in *Midrash*)], a disciple of R' Meir, said in the name of R' Meir: Tamar was the daughter of Shem who was a priest [see *comm.* to 14:18 where Malchizedek, the priest, is identified with Shem]. Therefore they sentenced her to be burnt.

[Cf. *Lev. 21:9*: The daughter of any priest who shall profane herself by playing the harlot (i.e. who is unchaste after betrothal or marriage — (*Sanhedrin* 51b; see *Rashi* there); she has thereby profaned her father: she shall be burned by fire.]

Ramban differs with *Rashi's* Midrashic interpretation inasmuch as the halachah, as formulated in *Sanhedrin* 50b, is clear that the punishment of burning stated in *Leviticus* 21:9 [cited above] applies only to a priest's daughter who committed adultery while she was betrothed or married. The death penalty certainly does not apply to a woman who acted the harlot while, as in Tamar's case, she was waiting to be married by the yabam [cf. also *Sanhedrin* 58a].

Rather, *Ramban* continues, the intent is that Judah condemned her to this punishment not on legal grounds, but because he was a great chief, and his daughter-in-law's harlotry was an affront to his status, just as a priest's

וישב כה הוא מוצאת והיא שלחה אל-חמיה
 לח/כה-כו לאמר לאיש אשר-אלה לו אנכי הרה
 ותאמר הכר-נא למי החתמת
 כו והפתילים והמטה האלה: ניכר יהודה

daughter who committed harlotry is condemned for having 'thereby profaned her father.' This judgment would not have been meted out to a commoner.

Alternatively, *Ramban* suggests that it is possible that their law was similar to the law current in Spain in *Ramban's* own time: That the punishment of an unfaithful woman was wholly at her husband's discretion. Since Tamar had been designated for Shelah, she was considered a married woman and Judah had the right to mete out punishment on his son's behalf.

Mizrachi defends *Rashi's* Midrashic citation by offering that the intent of the Midrash was only to explain why — once it was decided that Tamar was to be executed — the form of death decided upon was burning; that was because she was a daughter of Shem the priest. The reason that Judah ordered the death penalty at all may have been one of the following: (a) By committing an immoral act, she betrayed and defamed the aristocratic Judah. She deserved the death penalty much as one who transgressed against a king could be punished by death sentence through the crime itself, in other circumstances might not be a mortal one; (b) sexual immorality was rampant at the time, and the contingencies demanded that an example be made of Tamar to deter others from sinning [see cases cited in *Sanhedrin* 46a].

Gur Aryeh suggests that Tamar was given the death sentence because, after the Flood, Shem had legislated that immorality, even by an unmarried woman, is punishable by death. This tradition had come down to Judah from the Court of Shem [see *Avodah Zarah* 36b]. Because adultery by a married daughter of a priest is punishable by burning [Leviticus *ibid.*], Judah selected this punishment for Tamar as well.

[On the chronology of Tamar's being the daughter of Shem, see *comm.* to v. 6 s.v. ושמה מקר. See also footnote to v. 16.]

According to *R' Yehudah HaChassid* cited by *Baal HaTurim*, it was not Judah's intent to sentence her to death,

but to brand her. *Rosh*, in *Responsa* 818:13 mentions that the custom of branding harlots was current even in his time.

What caused *R' Yehudah HaChassid* to deviate from the traditional interpretation?

Torah Temimah conjectures that his point of view is possibly based on the fact that whenever the Torah refers to death by burning, for example *Lev.* 20:14; 21:9, the term *burn* is always qualified by the term *קאש*, in fire. Here that qualifying word is absent, and hence he interprets that the term *burn* connotes *disfiguring*, much as in the manner of *Ezekiel* 23:25. Once it was established however, that it was with Judah that she had consorted, the punishment was dropped.

25. הוא מוצאת — As she was taken out.

To be burnt (*Rashi*).

[The word for *she*, היא, in our passage is spelled הוא meaning *he*, but vowelized הוא, *she*.] *R' Huna* remarked: 'She was being taken out' — She and he should have been taken out! [i.e., by the dual *she/he* spelling, the Torah intimates that they both shared the guilt; it was only due to Tamar's reluctance to shame Judah publicly (as noted below) that *she* was condemned to be burned and not he (*Rashi* in *Midrash*)] (*Midrash*).

והיא שלחה אל חמיה — [And] she sent [word] to her father-in-law.

— Through those who were taking her out to be burned. What she sent was the following message to 'be transmitted *verbatim*' (*R' Bachya*).

— לאיש אשר אלה לו אנכי הרה — By the man to whom these belong I am with child.

25-26 ²⁵ As she was taken out, she sent word to her father-in-law, as follows, 'By the man to whom these belong I am with child.' And she said, 'Identify, if you please, whose are this seal, this wrap, and this staff.'

²⁶ Judah recognized; and he said, 'She is right; it is

Tamar did not shame Judah publicly by naming him as the father. She reasoned: 'If he admits it voluntarily, well and good; if not let them burn me, but let me not publicly disgrace him.' From this incident, the Sages taught [*Sotah* 10b]: 'One should rather let himself be thrown into a fiery furnace [as Tamar was ready to do] than expose his neighbor to public shame' (*Rashi*).⁽¹⁾

[Comp. the behavior of Potiphar's wife discussed in footnote to 39:1.]

וְתָאמַר הַכֹּהֵן — And she said, 'Recognize if you please'.

The expression כָּן [if you please] denotes a request [as distinct from *Onkelos* who renders the term as meaning now] (*Rashi*).

With the expression הַכֹּהֵן — [recognize if you please — is it your son's tunic or not? (37:32)] Judah had caused his father untold anguish. Now God repaid him 'measure for measure.' Tamar now made her accusation with that same expression, and its impact registered solidly upon Judah (*Sotah*

10b; *Midrash*; see *Maharsha* ad. loc. Cf. footnote next verse).

The inner intent of her request was: 'Recognize — i.e. acknowledge your Creator. [Even if you would be tempted to feign ignorance of the pledges and your involvement with me because no witnesses were present — acknowledge your Creator Who is All knowing, and hide not your eyes from me (*Maharsha*)], and do not destroy three lives [— mine and the two children I am carrying, by consigning me to be burned]' (*Rashi* based on *Sotah* 10b).

Apparently, though others did not discover that Tamar was carrying twins until the time of her childbirth [v. 27], Tamar herself was prophetically aware even then that she was carrying twins. In fact according to the *Midrash* cited in v. 24, Tamar was even aware she was carrying children from whom royalty would descend! (*Maskil leDavid*).

26. 'She is more righteous than I!'

וַיִּכְרַ הַיְהוָה — Judah recognized.⁽²⁾

The measure-for-measure aspect

1. If the Torah makes a special point of telling us that Tamar sent back his pledges only at the last moment, when "she was brought forth" to be executed, then there was good reason for it, notes R' Eleazar in the *Midrash* [see also *Sotah* 10b]: She had mislaid the pledges and could not find them. This was the work of Satan who did his utmost to impede the entry of the Messianic dynasty into the world for he understood it as his most dangerous enemy. Tamar implored Divine Mercy with all her soul and just as she was being led to the stake she found the objects as if by miracle. Thus, historical destinies sometimes hang by a thread and their happy outcome is dependent on a miracle (*R' Munk*).

2. Now when Judah saw the pledges, he recognized them and thought: 'It is better for me to be ashamed in this transient World, than be ashamed before my righteous fathers in the

וַיֹּאמֶר צְדָקָה מִמֶּנִּי כִּי־עַל־כֵּן לֹא־
נִתְּתִיהָ לְשֶׁלָּה בְּנִי וְלֹא־יִסֹּף עוֹד
כּו לְרַעְתָּהּ: וַיְהִי בַעַת לְדִתָּהּ וְהָיָה תְאוּמִים

of Tamar's words rang loudly in Judah's ears. See footnote.

צְדָקָה מִמֶּנִּי — *She is right; [it is] from me!*

The translation follows Rashi who renders: צְדָקָה, *she is right* in what she said; מִמֶּנִּי, *it is from me* that she is with child! [Cf. *Targum Yonasan*: 'Tamar is innocent; she is with child by me!']

Alternatively, Rashi cites the Sages that a *bas kol* [heavenly voice] came forth and said מִמֶּנִּי, i.e. 'From Me and My agency did these events unfold! [i.e., that these two people who are destined to be the ancestors of kings should have united in this manner]. Because Tamar was modest in her father-in-law's house [see *comm.* to v. 15], I have ordained that kings descend from her; and I have already ordained that I would make kings descend from the tribe of Judah.' [See *Overview*].

In citing the latter interpretation, Rashi follows: (a) The opinion in *Sotah* 10a that Judah could not have known that he was the father since she could have been intimate with others as well; (b) The opinion in *Makos* 23b which cites this as one of the three tribunals where the Divine voice was heard.

According to *Rashbam* and *Ramban* [in an interpretation which more closely follows the traditional cantillation punctuation] צְדָקָה מִמֶּנִּי is to be interpreted in the comparative sense similar to *I Samuel* 24:18: *And Saul said to David: You are more righteous than I, for you have treated me well whereas I have treated you badly.* In our case,

Judah said: *she is more righteous* [in this matter] *than I* — for she acted righteously in obeying My order to wait until Shelah grew up, but I did not keep my implied promise to let her marry Shelah when he was older. Since Shelah did not marry her as her brother-in-law, I was next in line to redeem her as her father-in-law [see *Ramban* v. 8].

'Her act of seducing me was ostensibly immoral, while my act in sending her the stipulated kid was ostensibly ethical — nevertheless, she was more righteous than I. For her intention was not for personal pleasure but only to bear children, while my intention was to recover my pledge and spare myself possible embarrassment.' As the Sages teach, a sin for the sake of heaven is greater than a selfish *mitzvah* (*Sforno*).

She is more righteous than I — My intention was an act of harlotry, when her intention was to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *yibum* (R' *Bachya*).

כִּי־עַל־כֵּן לֹא נִתְּתִיהָ לְשֶׁלָּה בְּנִי — *Inasmuch as [lit. for therefore] I did not give her to Shelah my son.*

The elliptical intent is: כִּי, *for* she has acted rightly, *עַל־אֲשֶׁר־עָלִיכֶן inasmuch as* I did not give her to Shelah my son (*Rashi*).

[Cf. Rashi's interpretation of the idiomatic expression כִּי־עַל־כֵּן in 18:5 and 33:10.]

... I acknowledge that Tamar is innocent. She is pregnant from me not because she yielded to any illicit passion, but because I did not give her my son Shelah.' A Divine voice then rang out and proclaimed, 'You are both innocent, for it was by My will that this has come to pass!' (*Targum Yerushalmi*).

When the Divine Voice forgave Judah, the

World to Come: it is better that I burn in this world with extinguishable fire, than burn in the World to Come with ever-consuming fire. For measure is set against measure. I used the same expression to my father when I asked him to identify his son's tunic and I am now constrained to hear at my judgment that I identify my signet, wrap and staff ...' (*Targum Yonasan*).

38 from me, inasmuch as I did not give her to Shelah my
27-28 son.' And he was not intimate with her anymore.

²⁷ And it came to pass at the time she gave birth
 that behold! There were twins in her womb. ²⁸ And it

Ministering Angels began chanting: ברוך אתה יהוה המרחם לטובות, Blessed are You HASHEM, the Compassionate One, Who forgives abundantly (Midrash of the Shemoneh Esrei Prayer [Beth HaMidrash 5:54a; Torah Sheleimah #115]).

According to a view in *Mechilta Beshallach* #5, when Reuben heard Judah confess, he too arose and [for the first time publicly] confessed regarding his desecration of his father's couch [see above 35:22 and comm. to 37:29 s.v. וְיָשָׁב רְאוּבֵן. See also *Rashi* to *Deut.* 33:7 s.v. וְיָשָׁב לַיהוּדָה].

The *Talmud* [*Sotah* 10b] notes that when Judah made this admission, his name יהודה — containing the dual meaning of the verb הודה, *thank* (29:35) and *admit* — finally acquired its full significance. HASHEM fully associated His Name, הוֹדִיָּה, with יהודה, thereby showing His affection for the one who has the moral courage to confess his sins publicly (*R' Munk*).

וְלֹא יָסָף עוֹד לִדְעָתָהּ — And he was not intimate with her any more [lit. and he did not continue to know her more; as noted in 4:1 ידע is used throughout Scripture as a delicate term for marital intimacy.]

[The translation follows the primary view of *Rashi*, *Onkelos*, and most commentators]:

Some understand כִּי לֹא יָסָף as *he did not continue*, while others explain the verb to mean *he did not cease* to be intimate with her thenceforth. A similar case is in *Numbers* 11:25 where וְלֹא יָסְפוּ [and they did not continue to prophesy] is rendered by *Onkelos* 'and they did not cease to prophesy' (*Rashi*; cf. *Sotah* 10b; see also *Rashi* to *Numbers* 11:25 and *Deut.* 5:19).

The view that he was not intimate

with her any more is based on the explanation that once Judah established progeny — that being his primary goal — it was his wish not to be intimate with her any further, even though a *yebamah* is considered a legitimate wife to the one who performs *yibum*. The fact that she was permitted to him was the very reason the other Sage explains our passage to infer that *he did not cease* being intimate with her. See *Deut.* 5:19 (*Ramban*).

Rashi in *Sotah* 10b explains the latter view by commenting that once the Divine Voice established that Tamar was righteous and had acted with the loftiest motives, Judah did not cease conducting himself with her as his full wife in every respect.

Possibly he did not continue to be intimate with her because the sight of her evoked memories of the sordid circumstances by which he first consorted with her. She was certainly prohibited to Shelah because she was now Judah's full wife in every sense (*Ozaim* *I'Torah*).

27. Tamar bears twins.

וַיְהִי בְעֵת לִדְתָהּ — And it came to pass at the time she gave birth [lit. at the time of her childbearing].

The *Midrash* draws a distinction between the phraseology here and the similar phraseology in regard to Rebecca's birth of Jacob and Esau [28:25:24]:

In the case of Rebecca the verse reads וַיִּמְלֹאוּ יָמֶיהָ לִלְדָה, *when her term to bear grew full*, because her term of pregnancy was complete; Tamar, however, did not carry a full term [she bore in the seventh month as noted above in v. 24] (*Rashi*).

וַיִּהְיוּ תְאוֹמִים בְּבֶטְנָהּ — That behold! There were twins in her womb.

וישב כח בבטנה: ויהי בלדתה ויתן יד ותקח
 לח/כח-ל המילדת ותקשר עליה שני לאמר
 כט זה יצא ראשונה: ויהי | במשיב ידו
 והנה יצא אחיו ותאמר מה-פרצת
 ל עליך פרץ ויקרא שמו פרץ: ואחר

They recognized this before the first child emerged, therefore, as the narrative continues, they tied the thread on the hand of the first (*Sforno*).

[Continuing the comparison with 25:24]: In our case the word for twins, תאומים, is spelled 'full,' while in the case of Esau and Jacob it is spelled 'defectively': תומם. In the latter case, one of them [i.e., Esau] was wicked [and therefore their similarity as twins was incomplete], while in the case of Tamar both were righteous [and they were תאומים, twins, in the fullest sense of the word] (*Rashi*).

That she bore twins is significant: Tamar's two sons took the place of her two husbands who died: Peretz took Er's place, while Zerach replaced Onan (*Alshich*).

28. וַיִּתֵּן יָד — One [lit. and he] put out [lit. gave] a hand.

I.e. one of them stretched forth his hand outside (*Rashi*).

Since they were as yet unnamed the Torah writes abstractly: *he* (unnamed) *stuck out his hand* (*Ibn Ezra*).

Because our passage associates giving birth with the one sticking out his hand, R' Huna ruled that the ritual uncleanness associated with giving birth [Lev. 12:2] technically begins with the moment part of the embryo begins to emerge, even though he might subsequently draw back (*Niddah* 28a).

ותקשר על ידו שני לאמר — And [she] tied a crimson [thread] on his hand, saying [i.e., as if to signify].

It was her intent to be able to identify this as the first born (*Sforno*).

זה יצא ראשונה — This one emerged first.

From this verse *Yerushalmi Bava Basra* 3:1 derives that the testimony of a midwife is accepted, provided it is given immediately after birth [cf. *Bavli Kiddushin* 74a].

29. 'Peretz.

ויהי במשיב ידו — And it was, as he drew back [lit. returned] his hand.

For after the midwife tied the scarlet thread on his hand he drew it back (*Rashi* v. 28).

Cf. *Ramban* to 40:10 who explains that this usage of the כ is temporal and denotes immediacy: *As soon as he drew back his hand*.

According to *Sforno*, he was במשיב יד, like one who drew back his hand — for he did not really draw it back of his own independent power; it was the pressure of the second emerging child that forced his hand back.

והנה יצא אחיו — That [lit. and] beheld! his brother emerged.

— By his own power; without the midwife's assistance (*Abarbanel*).

This was part of the Divine plan. For Zerach desired to emerge first but God declared: Messiah is destined to descend from Peretz; is it right, then, that Zerach should emerge first? Let Zerach return to his mother's womb, and Peretz shall be born first! (*Aggadas Bereishis* 64, *Torah Sheleimah* 8128).

מה-פרצת עליך פרץ — [With] what strength [Hebrew: *peretz*] you as-

happened that as she gave birth, one put out a hand; the midwife took a crimson thread and tied it on his hand saying, 'This one emerged first!' ²⁹ And it was, as he drew back his hand, that behold! his brother emerged. And she said, 'With what strength you asserted yourself!' And he named him Peretz.

serted yourself! [lit. you were strong].

— [As demonstrated by your emerging first, notwithstanding the fact that your brother had already stuck his hand out.]

The translation of פָּרַץ as denoting strength follows Rashi, and is consistent with his interpretation of the verb וּפְרָצָה in 28:14.

According to Ramban, the verb literally denotes the breaching of a fence, while more generally it refers to anything that oversteps its normal boundary. The latter is its meaning in 28:14 [referring to the conquest of land] and in 30:43 [where it refers to increase in wealth to the extent that one metaphorically burst through barriers until the region could not contain him; see Radak there]. In our context, her intent was: "What a great breach you have made in the 'fence' restraining you by hurrying out before your brother!" ^[1]

According to Ibn Ezra and Radak, the intent is, "Oh, how you have made a breach, and now the responsibility for the breach is upon you!" [That is, had your brother died because of your hurried breach, you would have been held responsible just as a thief who breaches

a wall is held accountable for the damage he causes thereby. See HaKsav V'HaKaballah.] Ramban disagrees with this interpretation.

וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פֶּרֶץ — And he named him Peretz. ^[1]

I.e., Judah named the child Peretz [meaning strength (Rashi) or: breaking forth (Ramban)] because of what the midwife had said (Radak).

[Peretz was the ancestor of the House of David from whom the Messiah would descend. His line of descendants were: Chetzron, Ram, Aminadab, Nachshon, Shalmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse and David (see Ruth 4:18-22).]

Peretz's action in 'breaking forth' is an indication of the royal privilege which will subsequently be held by his descendants. For the king 'has a right to open a breach for himself מֶלֶךְ פּוֹרֵץ גְּדֵרִים, lit. a king may breach fences blocking his direct path]; without anyone having the authority to stop him' [Sanhedrin 20b] (R' Munk).

1. Kabbalistically, the names Peretz and Zerach have great mystical significance.

Zerach [shining] was so called on account of the sun which always shines, and Peretz [breach] on account of the moon which is sometimes breached [i.e. its light is sometimes hidden (at the end of a month) and sometimes completely intact. But Peretz [symbolizing the moon] was the first born, although the sun is greater than the moon? [I.e. why should the firstborn be symbolized by the smaller orb?]] — In a sense Zerach, who stuck out his hand first, was to be the firstborn; but Peretz, the ancestor of the House of David, was given the Divine privilege of actually being the first born. The Davidic dynasty is likened to the moon because it underwent various stages of ascendancy and descendancy.

Since the Davidic dynasty evolved from Peretz who was likened to the moon, the Talmudic Sages [see Rosh HaShanah 25a], — when wishing to inform the Jews in other countries that the New Moon had appeared and been sanctified, would use the message 'David King of Israel lives and exists' (Ramban citing Sefer HaBahir; see comm. ad. loc. of R' Chavel).

וַיֵּצֵא אֶחָיו אֲשֶׁר עַל־יָדוֹ הַשָּׁנִי וַיִּקְרָא
 לֹט/א חמישי א שְׁמוֹ זֶרַח:
 הוֹרֵד מִצְרֵימָה וַיִּקְנְהוּ פוֹטִיפָר סִלִּים

30. Zerach.

אֲשֶׁר עַל־יָדוֹ הַשָּׁנִי — *On whose hand was the crimson [thread].*

Citing the *Midrash*, *Rashi* records that the word יָד, *hand*, occurs four times in this narrative, alluding to the four times that Achan, a descendant of Peretz, 'stretched forth his hand' to violate prohibitions (some by Moses and some by Joshua) against enjoying the spoils of various victories over the enemies of Israel. Thus, the four 'hands' signify four separate crimes.

Alternatively, the four references to *hand* allude only to the four items Achan took [from the spoils of Jericho; see *Joshua* *ibid.* v. 21]: A mantle from Shinar; two pieces of silver weighing two hundred *shekel*-weights; and a wedge of gold.

The commentators raise the problem that the Talmud and *Midrash* enumerate a total of

five such infractions committed by Achan — four in Moses' time and the fifth, at Jericho, in Joshua's time. *Gur Aryeh* suggests that there are two sets of four violations each: four separate occasions against Moses' order and the theft at Jericho when Achan took four individual items.

זֶרַח — *Zerach*.

— *Brightness*. Alluding to the brightness of the crimson thread (*Rashi*).

The name Zerach also alludes to how he shone forth [זֶרַח] by appearing, at least momentarily, before his brother (*Midrash HaGadol*).

Malbim notes that from Zerach there descended prophets and men who acquired רִיחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ, the Divine Spirit — [Ethan the Ezrachiite, Heiman, Kalkol and Darda [see *I Kings* 5:11] upon whom were the 'hand of God'. Since Peretz was to be the ancestor of *kings*, he had precedence in being the first born.

XXXIX

1. Joseph in Egypt.

The Torah takes up the thread temporarily dropped because of the Judah/Tamar interlude. As noted in 38:1, Judah's degradation had been interpolated at this point because it was his role in the sale of Joseph that caused the brothers to lower him from his leadership status. Furthermore, the close proximity of the narratives of Tamar and Potiphar's wife indicates

that both women had pure motives [both of them desiring to found a family in Israel.] For Potiphar's wife had foreseen by astrological signs that she was destined to be the ancestress of children by Joseph — but she did not know whether *she* or her daughter would have the children. [According to tradition, Joseph married her daughter. See *Rashi* to 41:45] (*Rashi*).^[1]

וַיִּוָּסֶף הוֹרֵד מִצְרֵימָה — [*And*] *Joseph*

1. If both of them acted with equal sincerity, why has Tamar entered Jewish history as a woman of great virtue while Potiphar's wife is remembered as a symbol of infidelity and treachery?

The difference lies not in their commendable ambitions but in their reaction to adversity.

38
30

³⁰ Afterwards his brother on whose hand was the crimson thread came out. And he named him Zerach.

39
1

¹ And Joseph had been brought down to Egypt. Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh, the Chamberlain

had been brought down to Egypt.

[The verb הוּרַד, *had been brought down*, is in past perfect indicating that this had already taken place in the distant past — not at this moment in the narrative. The sense of our passage is accordingly]:

During the interim — when Judah separated from his brothers and the episode of Tamar occurred — *Joseph had been brought down to Egypt (Sforno).*

Before Joseph's descent into Egypt — marking the beginning of the first Exile — Judah had already produced the ancestor of the Final Redeemer, the King Messiah who

will descend from Peretz (*Daas Zekeinim*).^[2]

That Joseph was brought into Egypt was already mentioned in 37:36. It is now repeated in order to resume the narrative of Joseph from the point it was left off (*Radak*. [See *Abarbanel* below.]

פּוֹטִיפָר כְּרִים פָּרַעַה שֶׁר הַטְּבָחִים — *Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh, the Chamberlain of the Butchers.*

This is repeated from 37:36 to emphasize the Providential Hand in this matter. Joseph could have been carried off to a far-away land and made to do menial slave-work. Instead he was brought to Egypt,

Tamar accepts the death sentence in silence rather than humiliate Judah. But, in contrast, when the wife of Potiphar sees her incessant blandishments resisted by Joseph [see v. 10 below] she publicly slanders and effects the disgrace and imprisonment of an innocent man (*R' Munk*) [cf. footnote to 40:1].

2. Prelude to Exile.

Joseph's descent into Egypt was, as the Sages perceive, the prelude to the Egyptian exile foretold to Abraham at the Covenant Between the Parts (15:13).

The phrase הוּרַד מִצְרַיִם, *Joseph had been brought down to Egypt*, has, according to *Tanchuma Yashan*, the deeper implication that 'Joseph brought down (הוּרַד) his father and the tribal ancestors to Egypt. That is, God engineered Joseph's descent into Egypt in order to implement His decree that Jacob would be exiled, but to spare him harshness of a forced descent into hostile conditions.

As *R' Yitzchak* is quoted in *Shabbos* 89b: *אָבִי הָיָה יֻעָקָב אֲבִינוּ לִירֵד לְמִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁלְשָׁאוֹת* *שֶׁל בָּרָק אֲלָא שׁוּבוֹתוֹ נִקְמָה לֹא* *It would have been fitting for our father Jacob to go down to Egypt in iron chains [in the manner of all exiles, since it was by God's Decree that he went there (Rashi ad. loc.)], but his merit availed him [that he should go instead as Joseph's honored guest], for it is written [Hoshea 11:4]: I drew them with human ties, with cords of love.*

Midrash Tanchuma elaborates: *Joseph was brought down to Egypt* — this is the intent of the verse in *Hoshea* [cited above]: for Joseph's earlier descent to Egypt caused Jacob to follow him honorably and begin the exile. The matter may be compared to a cow refusing to be dragged to its work. Rather than dragging her in chains, her calf was taken away from her and led to the field. When the cow heard her calf bleating, she went there willingly, for the sake of the calf.

Thus, Joseph's descent to Egypt was divinely orchestrated so Jacob and his sons should eventually follow in honor [see *Oznaim l'Torah* cited in footnote to 37:15, and *Overview*].

According to *Hadar Zekeinim*, Joseph was not brought down to Egypt alone: The Divine Presence, as it were, descended with him.

וַיִּשָּׁב לִטְבּ פֶּרְעָה שֶׁר הַטְּבָחִים אִישׁ מִצָּרֵי מִנֶּה
ב הַיִּשְׁמְעָאִלִּים אֲשֶׁר הוֹרְדָהוּ שָׁמָּה: וַיְהִי
יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מִצְלִיחַ וַיְהִי

the greatest metropolis of the time, to the home of one of Pharaoh's courtiers, a man who, as we see later, was in charge of the prison where Joseph was eventually incarcerated.

The translation of *סָרִיס* as *courtier* follows *Onkelos*. See *comm.* to 37:36. The translation of *שֶׁר הַטְּבָחִים* as *chamberlain of the butchers* follows *Rashi* in 37:36. Most others translate *הַטְּבָחִים* as *executioner*, which is how *R' Bachya* to our verse also interprets the term, citing parallel meanings in *Jeremiah* 39:13; *II Kings* 25:11; *Daniel* 2:14. *Rashbam* interprets the term as referring to the officer in charge of condemned criminals and other prisoners.

The *Midrash* notes that Potiphar is identical with Potiphara [whose daughter Joseph later married (41:45).] He was called *Potiphar* because he fattened bulls (*מְקַטֵּם פָּרִים*, *m'fatem parim*) for idolatrous purposes.

The Sages in *Sotah* 13b [who understand *סָרִיס* in the familiar sense of *eunuch, castrate*] maintain that Potiphar purchased Joseph for purposes of sodomy, but Gabriel was dispatched to castrate and then mutilate him (*פרַעַי*, *Phera*, referring to the removal of the *membrum*); hence he was later called *Potiphara*.

Rashi in *Sanhedrin* 92b mentions that it was the custom of ancient kings to castrate their court officials so they would not marry and instead be devoted entirely to the service of the monarch.

According to *Ramban* below [v. 19], Potiphar had married as a youth, and later fell victim to a disease which made him impotent and lack desire for conjugal relations.

מִצְרִי — *A prominent Egyptian* [lit. *an Egyptian man*].

[The term *prominent* is suggested by the superfluous appellation *אִישׁ מִצְרִי*, which in Scriptural usage is

usually reserved for an important personage.]

According to the *Midrash*, the term is descriptive: A man who possessed the proverbial wisdom of the Egyptian.

Maharil Diskin interprets: *An Egyptian resident* — and hence entitled to own a slave.

R' Hirsch notes the repeated mention that Potiphar was an *Egyptian*. That such was his nationality was self-evident from the mere fact that he was a high official in Pharaoh's court. Rather the word must be understood to reflect his attitude and morals. The 'elite' Egyptians looked with contempt upon the nomads of Canaan, and Joseph's moral code could hardly have differed more sharply from that of the lecherous Egyptians. That Joseph could have succeeded to such a degree in an 'Egyptian' society is the best testimony to his unusual ability and intelligence.

וַיִּקְנֵהוּ ... מִנֶּה הַיִּשְׁמְעָאִלִּים אֲשֶׁר הוֹרְדָהוּ שָׁמָּה — [And he] purchased him from [the hand of] the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.

In 37:27, the *Medianites*, rather than the *Ishmaelites*, are described as having sold Joseph into Egypt. This discrepancy and the various reconciliations of the sequence of the sale have been fully dealt with in 37:27: "Who sold Joseph?" But a brief summary — as the discrepancy directly relates to our verse — is in order.

To recapitulate:

It is not clear how *Rashi* — who main-

of the Butchers, a prominent Egyptian, purchased him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ² *HASHEM* was with Joseph, and he became a

tains that the Medanites/Midianites bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites and then sold him into Egypt — reconciles with our verse. *Daas Zekeinim* postulates that our verse intimates that Potiphar agreed to purchase Joseph only after the Ishmaelites gave their *hand* to guarantee that Joseph had indeed become the property of the Medanites. [Comp. *Midrash Tanchuma* in 37:36.]

Ramban maintains that the Ishmaelite caravan owners hauled Joseph to Egypt on behalf of the Midianites; hence the sale was attributed *indirectly* to them since they were the ones *who had brought him down there*, and the Torah refers to them alternately as Ishmaelites and Midianites.

Ibn Ezra maintains that the Torah refers to the Midianites and Ishmaelites interchangeably because they are kinsmen. *Gur Aryeh* elaborates and explains that the term *Ishmaelite* was the common designation for the clan which included the Midianites. Our verse intimates that Potiphar assumed by their dress that they were Ishmaelites, but the Torah, in 37:28, informed us that they were really Midianites.

The *Midrash* notes the proverbial irony and obvious Hand of Providence in this sale:

R' Levi remarked: A slave buys, the son of a slave woman sells, and a free man is slave to both! [That is, the purchaser was Potiphar — a descendant of Ham whom Noah had cursed that he should be a 'slave's slave to his brothers' (9:25), and who was now a slave to Pharaoh; the sellers were the Ishmaelites, descendants of Abraham's

slave Hagar; and the slave of such people was Joseph, the firstborn son of Jacob's favorite wife.]

Although Joseph was urged to answer questions about his origin, he admitted only that he was an Ivri [Hebrew]. He divulged no more, and kept the oath of secrecy that was imposed upon him against attempting to return to his father, or revealing his identity (*Midrash HaGadol*) [see footnote to 37:28; *Ramban* to 42:9 below; *Rashi* to 45:27].

2. וַיְהִי ה' אִתּוֹ יוֹסֵף. — [And] *HASHEM* was with Joseph.

— Enabling him to withstand spiritual absorption by his heathen captors (*Chizkuni*).

— Protecting him from his enemies (*Sforno*).

The connotation of God being 'with' someone, an expression occurring often in Scripture [usually עם rather than אִתּוֹ occurs], refers to Providence watching over the details of man's various activities according to the degree of man's perfection (*Rambam: Moreh Nevuchim* 3:18, see comm. to 28:15).¹¹

The word אִתּוֹ denotes an exegetical amplification [רְבִיבִי]: Not only was *HASHEM* with Joseph, but with everyone with whom he came in contact. Compare the case of Lot who accumulated great wealth merely by virtue of accompanying Abraham [see 13:5] (*Vayaged Yaakov*).

Abarbanel comments that each of the three stiches in this verse is introduced by the word וַיְהִי. God's special Providential beneficence was present in

1. According to R' Hirsch the triple mention of וַיְהִי in this verse evokes the Rabbinic observation that the other brothers required no special Divine care because they were together in the company of Jacob and their families. Joseph, however, was an isolated outcast from his family, thrown into the most incongenial circumstances. He needed God to be always near and 'with' him. But conversely, if God was with Joseph, that could only have been because Joseph

וַיֹּשֶׁב לֵט/גֵּד
בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרִי: וַיֵּרָא אֲדֹנָיו כִּי
יְהוָה אִתּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-הוּא עֹשֶׂה יְהוָה
מַצְלִיחַ בְּיָדוֹ: וַיִּמָּצֵא יוֹסֵף חָן בְּעֵינָיו
וַיִּשְׂרֹת אֹתוֹ וַיַּפְקְדֵהוּ עַל-בֵּיתוֹ וְכָל-יִשְׂ-

each happening. The stich *HASHEM was with Joseph* alludes to the fact that he was divinely inspired to interpret dreams with *absolute* accuracy, an impossible feat had he relied merely on human wisdom.

— He enjoyed a special Providential success, transcending the natural (*Malbim*).

— *And he became a successful man.*

In accomplishing whatever was required of him (*Sforno; Abarbanel*).

— Joseph's success was especially striking in view of the adverse factors facing him. *He was in the house of his master* — and natural success usually comes to one who is his own master; otherwise, his success is not considered his but his master's. Furthermore his master was *Egyptian*, a further negative factor in the view of Divine Providence (*Malbim*).

Ksav Sofer notes that *מַצְלִיחַ* is in the causative form: his mere presence caused others as well to prosper.

— *[And] he remained [lit. was] in the house of his Egyptian master.*

— This is yet another manifestation of God's beneficent Provi-

dence: Although most slaves are consigned to strenuous labor in the field, Joseph was given a relatively easy job inside the Egyptian's house (*Abarbanel*).

Furthermore, Providence caused him to work near his master and mistress at jobs in which he could distinguish himself. Indeed that soon became the case (*Ibn Caspi*).

Here the title of distinction *אִישׁ* is omitted because, as noted above, Potiphar's lewd designs on Joseph resulted in his castration by the angel Gabriel (*R' Shea Brander*).

3. — *[And] his master perceived [lit. saw] that HASHEM was with him.*^[1]

I.e., God's Name was always in his mouth (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).

[The sense is that Joseph would invoke God's Name whenever he undertook a task.]

According to *Ramban*, the phrase intimates that Potiphar concluded from Joseph's unusual success in all his endeavors, that he was aided by God. The phrase is similar to 26:28: *We have indeed seen that HASHEM has been with you* — which indicates a perception of Divinely granted success.

Rashi, however, disagrees with *Ramban's*

was with God. If man's own aspirations coincide with God's purpose, then He arranges circumstances conducive to their achievement.

Midrashically — as has been often noted in this commentary — the word *וַיֵּרָא* introduces a sad event. An objection was raised on the basis of our verse: *HASHEM was with [וַיֵּרָא] Joseph and he became [וַיֵּרָא] a successful man* — which would certainly imply an occasion for rejoicing?

R' Shmuel replied: This instance, too, is not a cause for joy; it was because of Joseph's success that Potiphar's wife assailed him (*Vayikra Rabbah* 11:7).

1. The first rays of the Divine light penetrated the spiritual darkness of Egypt only thanks to Joseph's presence. As the Sages teach, the *Shechinah* had 'accompanied' him there, and it hovered over him so plainly that even Potiphar could 'see' it (*R' Hirsch; R' Munk*).

successful man; he remained in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ His master perceived that HASHEM was with him, and whatever he did HASHEM made succeed through him. ⁴ Joseph found favor in his eyes, and he attended him. He appointed him over his household, and whatever he had he

interpretation since the very next phrase of our verse explicitly mentions Joseph's success. Therefore, *Rashi* prefers the Midrashic interpretation that this stich speaks of Joseph's constant invocation of God's Name (*Gur Aryeh*).

According to another view in the *Midrash* [cited by *Ramban* in v. 4], because Joseph was always whispering HASHEM's Name, Potiphar accused him of sorcery, until, as this verse tells us, *His master perceived* — i.e., in a dream or some other form of vision — that HASHEM was with him. Potiphar was shown the Divine Presence standing over Joseph; only then did Joseph find favor in his sight, and Potiphar realized that Joseph's success was God-given.

[This view, that the wicked Potiphar could have perceived — even in a dream — the Divine Presence, is disputed by the former Midrashic view (cited in part by *Rashi*) that HASHEM is with him means that God's Name never left Joseph's lips, a phenomenon that convinced Potiphar of Joseph's Godliness.]

The noun *master*, אָדוֹן, often occurs in the plural form, as do other nouns denoting power or lordship, for example כְּצִלוֹ = כְּצִלָּיו (*Rashi* to 35:8). In our passage the plural form אֲדֹנָיו has a singular connotation — *his master*, and takes a singular verb וַיֵּאָדָר.]

וְכָל אֲשֶׁר הָיָה עֹשֶׂה ה' מְצַלִּיחַ בְּיָדוֹ — And [that] whatever he did [lit. does] HASHEM made succeed through him [lit. in his hand].

— Even those undertakings that would have failed had they been

undertaken by someone else (*Malbim*).

In his hand idiomatically denotes immediacy — whatever he undertook succeeded immediately (*Minchah Belulah*).

The *Midrash* takes in his hand literally: If Potiphar would bid Joseph, 'Mix me a hot drink,' he would obey immediately; likewise if he would say, 'Mix me a cold drink'; 'Give me strong wine'; or 'Give me diluted wine.' In every case Joseph would serve it immediately for it miraculously changed of itself in his hand. For whatever he did, HASHEM made succeed in his hand.

[It is not clear how *Ramban* would interpret the apparent redundancy in this verse except to maintain that it clarifies the earlier stich by explaining that Potiphar was able to perceive Joseph's unusual success as God-given since it was obvious in everything he undertook.]

4. As a result of his perception that Joseph was Divinely assisted, Potiphar took a special liking to him. First he made him his personal attendant, and afterwards appointed him over his house.

וַיִּשְׁרֶת אֹתוֹ — And he attended him.

I.e., Joseph became his personal attendant, and was freed from all other tasks (*Sforno*; *Hirsch*; *Haamek Davar*).

He served אֹתוֹ, his master, exclusively, and none other (*Malbim*).

וְכָל-יִשְׁלֹוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדוֹ — And whatever [lit. all] he had he placed in his custody [lit. hand].¹¹

1. Following the *Midrash* cited above that everything Joseph took into his hands prospered, this verse intimates that Potiphar would bring Joseph all merchandise he planned to sell. Joseph would merely touch it and he could command the highest profit (*Tzeidah LaDerech*).

ה לו נתן בידו: ויהי מאז הפקיד אתו
בביתו ועל כל אשר יש-לו ויברך
יהוה את-בית המצרי בגלל יוסף ויהי
ברכת יהוה בכל אשר יש-לו בבית
ו ובשרה: ויעזב כל אשר-לו ביד-יוסף
ולא ידע אתו מאומה כי אם-הלחם
אשר-הוא אוכל ויהי יוסף יפה-תאר

— Potiphar appointed him overseer of all his possessions, both in his house and in his fields (*Ramban*).

He had Potiphar's fullest confidence in every domestic matter (*R' Bachya*).

The phrase וכל־יש-לו is elliptic and should be interpreted as if it read וכל־אשר־יש-לו (*Rashi*).

5. ויברך ה' את בית המצרי בגלל יוסף — That [lit. and] *HASHEM* blessed the Egyptian's house on Joseph's account.

— I.e. in his merit, since he was righteous (*Ramban*) to a parallel expression in 30:27).

Although the Egyptian house should not have been worthy of any special Providential grace, it was blessed because of Joseph (*Malbim*).

The *Shechinah* accompanies the righteous and causes their environs to prosper. Isaac brought prosperity to Gerar [26:12], Jacob to Laban [30:30], and Joseph to Potiphar (*Midrash*).

Cf. *Berachos* 42a: תיכף לת"ח ברכה, a blessing promptly follows a scholar. Our verse is cited.

בבית ובשרה — In the house and [in] the field.

Of the total of twelve months that Joseph spent in Potiphar's house [*Seder Olam*] six were in the house [intimating the cold, rainy

season — when Joseph was in charge of domestic affairs] and six in the field [intimating the warm season when Joseph was in charge of the field work] (*Midrash*).

When he was in the fields, the fields were blessed; when in the house, the house was blessed (*Tanchuma*).

6. ולא ידע אתו מאומה — And with him [present] he concerned himself with nothing.

As long as Joseph was in attendance over his person and supervised his affairs, Potiphar felt secure that all was in good hands. Literally, the verse reads: And he did not know with him anything. The translation follows *Rashi*.

כי אם־הלחם אשר הוא אוכל — Except for the bread he ate.

This is a delicate expression; bread here refers to his wife (*Rashi*).

[The sense is that Potiphar unquestioningly entrusted to Joseph everything except for his own wife.]

Bread is a familiar euphemism for 'wife', and eat for conjugal intimacy. *Rashi* pursues this interpretation [following the *Midrash*], rather than food in the literal sense, because in v. 9 Joseph himself says that only Potiphar's wife was withheld from him in the house.

That Potiphar was, according to the Sages, a castrate [see v. 1] does not contradict this

placed in his custody.

⁵ And it happened, that from the time he appointed him in his house and over whatever he had, HASHEM blessed the Egyptian's house on Joseph's account, so that HASHEM's blessing was in whatever he owned, in the house and in the field. ⁶ He left all that he had in Joseph's custody and with him present he concerned himself with nothing except for the bread he ate. Now Joseph was handsome of form and handsome of appearance.

passage which implies: except for the wife with whom he consorted. For the phrase does not imply present tense but past: *with whom he used to consort* before he was castrated as punishment for his lewd designs on Joseph. Furthermore there are varying degrees of 'castration' some affecting only the degree of desire (Mizrachi; Gur Aryeh; cf. Daas Zekeinim to v. 19).

According to Ibn Ezra, bread has the sense of 'food': Joseph was in charge of everything except the bread which Potiphar ate. This, Joseph was not even allowed to touch since Egyptians regarded it as an abomination for Hebrews to touch their food [see 43:22].

Ramban offers an alternative interpretation: Servants habitually steal from their masters, but Joseph was different: for himself, he took only the food to which he was entitled. Thus, Potiphar did not know of Joseph taking anything from him except for the bread he (Joseph) ate.

Tur interprets: Potiphar would not interfere at all in household matters; Joseph would have free reign of the house. Potiphar would give orders only regarding the kind of food he wanted each day.

וְיֵהְיֶה יוֹסֵף יָפֶה תָאֵר וְיִפְהָ מְרָאָה — Now Joseph was handsome of form and handsome of appearance.

— Possessing handsome features and a radiant appearance [complexion] (Rashi to parallel expression in 29:17).

[See comm. to יָפֶה מְרָאָה in 12:11 and יָפֶה מְרָאָה in 24:16.]

— In this Joseph resembled his mother [see 29:17] (Ibn Ezra).

As the Midrash observes: 'Throw a stick into the air and it falls back to its source.' Rachel was beautiful and so was Joseph.

This stich serves as an introduction to the following episode. It was on account of his good looks that his master's wife cast her gaze upon him (Ramban).

Citing the Midrash, Rashi explains the contextual placement of this passage here as it affects the continuity of the narrative:

When Joseph was given this important position, he began to eat, drink, and curl his hair. God said of him: 'Your father is mourning [for you] and you curl your hair! I will incite the bear [Potiphar's wife] against you.' Immediately [as implied by the expression אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, *after these things* (see Rashi next verse)] ... his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph.¹¹

1. The Midrashic metaphor of symbolically referring to Potiphar's wife as a 'bear' is not entirely clear.

Maharzu [Bereishis Rabbah 84:7] discusses this and cites an interpretation that the bear is shameless, as was Potiphar's wife.

R' David Feinstein conjectures that the metaphor reflects how Potiphar's wife was persis-

וישב ויפה מראה: ויהי אחר הדברים האלה
 ותשא אשת ארנני את עיניה אל-יוסף
 ונתאמר שכבה עמי: וימאן | ויאמר אל-
 אשת ארנני הן ארני לא ירע אתי מה-

Another view offered by the *Midrash* [see *Rashi* to 37:2] is that the temptation of his mistress was brought upon Joseph in retribution for his accusation against the brothers. He told Jacob that they cast their eyes on other women; as punishment, a woman cast her covetous eyes on him.

R' Hirsch notes the remarkable placement of the Torah's description of Joseph's good looks. Instead of mentioning them first, the Torah first lists all of Joseph's spiritual virtues and his successful management of Potiphar's affairs. Those virtues, not his handsome appearance, led to his speedy promotions. Potiphar's wife, too, was drawn to him primarily because of his outstanding character and achievement. His good looks were but the crowning feature in attracting here passionate attention.

This supports the Midrashic interpretation which maintains that Potiphar's wife's intentions were as pure as Tamar's [see *Rashi* v. 1] (*HaKsav V'HaKabbalah*; *Yalkut Yehudah*).

7. Potiphar's wife makes unwelcome advances to Joseph which he repels.

אחר הדברים האלה — *After these things.*

As the Sages note in *Sotah* 33a, and as *Rashi* comments in 15:1, 22:1, 22:20, and here, the expression אחר הדברים האלה signifies a short lapse of time from the preceding, or that the new

event is dependent upon, and the direct result of the preceding one. The expression אחר הדברים האלה in contrast, signifies a long lapse of time from the preceding, or that the narratives are not inherently unified. [See *Mizrachi* and *Gur Aryeh* cited in *comment* to 22:20.]

In continuity with *Rashi's* comment to v. 6 above, the intent is that the advances of Potiphar's wife immediately followed, and were a direct result of, Joseph's aforementioned beauty [and his other qualities, as R' Hirsch observes]. According to *Rashi's* Midrashic interpretation, her seductions were a cause-and-effect result of Joseph's vain reaction to his new-found fortune and environment. He was overconfident, and God was testing his mettle.

Cf. *Alshich*; *Malbim*: The following events happened only after these things — i.e. only after she observed the handsome and exceptionally talented Joseph's dramatic rise to power in her husband's house. Before then, she would never have dreamt of consorting with a lowly slave.

ותשא ... אשת ארנני את עיניה אל-יוסף — *His master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph* [lit. *lifted up her eyes to Joseph*].

I.e., she became inflamed by his beauty. The expression *casting eyes* throughout Scripture denotes longing and desire. Cf. *Psalms* 123:1; *Ezekiel* 18:12.

The righteous are exalted through their eyes, but the wicked fall through their eyes (*Midrash*).

tant and relentless in her evil designs against Joseph. She was like the bear which the Talmud [*Kiddushin* 72a] describes as מנוחה אין להם מנוחה. *they have no rest*. The bear is restless and persistent in pursuing his desires. So, too, Potiphar's wife — she was dogged in her pursuit of Joseph. [Cf. also the metaphor of a bear in *Proverbs* 17:12.]

⁷ After these things, his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and she said, 'Lie with me.' ⁸ But he adamantly refused. He said to his master's wife, 'Look — with me here, my master concerns himself

The *Midrash* relates that Joseph was so exceptionally handsome [which was even more conspicuous in Egypt where, as *Rashi* notes in 12:11, the people were ugly], that the Egyptian women would come to gaze upon him. Once, Potiphar's wife gave them each an ethrog and a knife [to peel it with]. They became so overcome by Joseph's beauty that the knives slipped and they cut their hands.

'This is how you are affected when you see him only a moment,' she said to them. 'How much more so I who see him all day long!' She ceaselessly attempted to entice him, but he resisted temptation.

שָׁכְבָה עִמִּי — *Lie with me.*

Accused are the wicked! Elsewhere we find Ruth delicately saying: *Spread your robe over your handmaid* [Ruth 3:9], but this one [Potiphar's wife] spoke like an animal, *Lie with me* (*Midrash*).

8. וַיִּמָּאֵן — But [lit. and] he [adamantly] refused.

[The adverb *adamantly* is suggested by the staccato and emphatic cantillation by which this word is punctuated: the *shalsholes*, followed by the disjunctive *psik*, both of which set off the word and enhance the absoluteness of its implication. It indicates that Joseph's refusal was constant, categorical, and definitive. Joseph repulsed her with absolute firmness.]

1. In this regard, *Sfas Emes* makes a key point concerning human behavior. One must have a firm resolve concerning what he will or will not do; then he may seek to find a rationale that will make it palatable to himself and others. If he first seeks to rationalize what is right and what is wrong, he can easily fall prey to man's capacity for self-delusion.

Joseph began with a firm principle! He would not sin! Only then did he attempt to show that decency, etiquette, gratitude, or other considerations dictated the same course of conduct.

Cf. *Haamek Davar*: The Torah thus attests to the fact that Joseph's refusal [further in this verse] was unequalized. The reason he later gives for his refusal was wrangled out of him by Potiphar's wife, but he himself had no need to rationalize it.⁽¹⁾

There is a Talmudic view, however, that Joseph's resolve once weakened, but he saw the image of his father who admonished him: 'Joseph, Joseph! Your brothers' names will one day be inscribed in the High Priest's breastplate; would you want to be left out as a consort of an adulteress?' Thus he was inspired to resist her (*Sotah* 36b; see *Rashi* to v. 11 and to 49:22).

[The *Zohar* observes how Joseph was later rewarded with the same expression וַיִּמָּאֵן, but he refused and said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, declared, "Joseph! By your life these very words will some day be used on an occasion when your sons are to be blessed." Thus we read [48:19]: His father refused [to change his intended order of blessing Ephraim and Menashe] and said, 'I know, my son; I know.'

וַיִּמָּאֵן אֶל אִשְׁתּוֹ אָדֹנָי — [And] he said to his master's wife.

She is referred to as *his master's wife* to emphasize that as such, Joseph had reason to fear antagonizing her, but he feared God even more, and refused her advances (*Ramban*).

לֹא יָדַע אֶתִּי מִהָבֵיטָה — Look — with me here, my master con-

וַיֹּשֶׁבֶט לִטְ-י
 ט בְּבֵית וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-יֵשׁ-לּוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדִי: אֵינְנִי
 גְּדוֹל בְּבֵית הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא-חָשָׁךְ מִמֶּנִּי
 מֵאוֹמָה כִּי אִם-אוֹתָךְ בְּאֲשֶׁר אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ
 וְאִיךָ אֶעֱשֶׂה הִרְעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת
 וְחָטָאתִי לָאֱלֹהִים: וַיְהִי כִּדְבָרָה אֶל-יִסְחָר
 יוֹם | יוֹם וְלֹא-שָׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ לְשַׁכַּב אִצְלָהּ

cerns himself about nothing in the house.

He has unbounded confidence in my capabilities ... and in my honesty (R' Hirsch).

How can I so ungratefully betray his confidence? (*Malbim; Haamek Davar*).

[Although, as noted, Joseph had no need to rationalize his refusal, and could have bluntly stated, 'How can you expect me to sin to God? He nevertheless tried to pacify her in terms she could understand so as not to incur the wrath of his master's wife, a person who had the power to harm him].

'I am mortally afraid of my master,' Joseph said. 'Then I will kill him,' she proposed.

'Is it not enough that you want to make me into an adulterer?' Joseph countered. 'Now you also want me to become an accomplice to murder!' (*Midrash*).

9. [Joseph presses further with the human aspect of his refusal. How can he be such an ingrate to the master who entrusted him with every one of his possessions except his wife?]

אֵינְנִי גְּדוֹל בְּבֵית הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי — *There is no one greater in this house than I.*

The translation of אֵינְנִי, as לִית, *there is no one*, follows most editions of *Onkelos*.

Others render אֵינְנִי, *he is not*. [Thus the antecedent of the pro-

noun *he* is Potiphar.] Joseph told her, *He* [i.e. Potiphar] *is not greater in this house than I* [i.e., even Potiphar himself wields no more authority in this house than he has bestowed upon me (*HaKsav VHaKabbalah*)].

— The honor he bestowed upon me is that he is not greater than I (*Malbim; Abarbanel*).

The latter interpretation is followed by many commentators and is apparently based on a different version of *Onkelos* which instead of לִית [= אֵינְנִי, *there is not*] reads לִיתוּהִי [= אֵינְנִי, *he is not*]. This version appears in many *Chumashim*, e.g. *Chorev, Malbim, Haamek Davar, Mechokekei Yehudah, Torah Temimah*.

The early commentary on *Onkelos*, *Ya'er*, defends the former version of *Onkelos*. He maintains that *Onkelos* subtly elicited the intent of the passage by translating the nuance as *there is no one greater*, rather than *he* [i.e. Potiphar] *is not greater*. This is a matter of etiquette because in fact the servant can never equal the higher status of his master, who appointed him and can dismiss him at will. [The Hebrew אֵינְנִי is accordingly taken idiomatically: *One is not greater in this house than I.*]

But — כִּי אִם אוֹתָךְ בְּאֲשֶׁר אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ [lit. *other than*] you, since you are his wife.

It was only in matters of conjugal relationship that he forbade us to be involved with one another. [In ordinary business or household matters I was in your service] (*Sforno*).

It is possible, also, that Potiphar once specifically warned Joseph

about nothing in the house, and whatever he has he placed in my custody.⁹ There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has denied me nothing but you, since you are his wife. How then can I perpetrate this great evil? I will have sinned against God!

¹⁰ And so it was — just as she coaxed Joseph day after day, so he would not listen to her to lie beside

regarding his wife, for she was beautiful (*Radak*).

וְחָטְאתִי לֹאֵלֹהִים — [And] I will have sinned against [lit. to] God!

Apart from the wrong I would be doing against your husband, it would also be — as is all immorality — a sin against God (*Mizrachi*).

— Incest and adultery were forbidden to the descendants of Noah ['Noachides' — a term denoting all mankind prior to the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, and all Non-Israelites after the Giving of the Torah] (*Rashi*; *Sanhedrin* 56b [see *comm.* to 2:16]).¹¹

Now, I might be able to conceal my act from man, but never from Him! (*Chizkuni*).

Ramban agrees with *Rashi's* comment that Joseph's reference was to the sin of immorality. *Ramban* adds that Joseph first emphasized the disloyalty and betrayal to his master because she would understand that better. Only then did he add that it would also constitute a sin to God.

Alternatively, *Ramban* suggests that Joseph was intimating that betrayal of his master would in itself be considered as a sin against

God Who concerns Himself with man's rights. According to this interpretation, Joseph made no reference to the prohibition of adultery, since he wanted to address her in terms suitable to her.

10. וַיְהִי כִּנְדָבָה אֶל־יוֹסֵף יוֹם יוֹם — And so it was — just as she coaxed [lit. spoke to] Joseph day [after] day.

According to a Midrashic view in *Daas Zekeinim* (by analogy with *Esther* 3:7), the expression יוֹם יוֹם means twelve months.

She tried to entice him in every way possible: with words; by varying her dress; by threats of imprisonment, humiliation and physical harm; by offering him huge amounts of money (*Yoma* 35b).

It is based on this verse that the Sages proclaimed [*Avos* 1:4, *Nedarim* 20a]: 'He who speaks too much to a woman is eventually seduced by her to sin' (*Midrash HaGadol*).

וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֵלָיָהּ — So [lit. and] he would not listen to her.¹²

'Why don't you listen to me?' she urged. 'I am married and no one would be the wiser.'

1. Potiphar's wife too was included in the designation 'Noachide,' and she too would have sinned by this act. Why then did Joseph not use the plural וְחָטְאוּ, and we will have sinned against God?

However, this righteous Joseph did not want to associate with a wicked person even as the co-subject of a sentence (*R' Heshel* — *Chanukas HaTorah*).

2. The *Midrash* relates that a matron once asked the Talmudic Sage *R' Yose*:

'Could it really be true that Joseph, a seventeen-year old youth in all his passion, rejected

וישב יא להיות עמה: ויהי כהיום הזה ויבא
 לט/יא-יב הביתה לעשות מלאכתו ואין איש
 יב מאנשי הבית שם בבית: ותתפשטו

'Even your unmarried women are forbidden to us,' Joseph replied; 'all the more you who are married!' In this way, Joseph rebuffed her.

R' Yehudah bar Nachman compared the above to the case of a non-Jew who offered a delicacy to a Jew.

'What is it?' the Jew asked.

'It is pork,' came the reply.

'Fool!' the Jew angrily retorted. 'Even the flesh of a kosher animal slaughtered by a non-Jew is forbidden us; how much more so pork!' (*Tanchuma*).

According to the *Yalkut*, Joseph also told her that he was afraid of his father in Canaan. 'When Reuben committed an infraction by tampering with my father's bedroom [see *comm.* to 35:22] it was considered adultery and as a result of it his birthright was taken from him and given to me. If I listen to you, I might forfeit my birthright as well.'

לשכב אצלה — To lie beside her.

— Even without sexual intimacy (*Rashi*).

— Even while fully clothed, or to simply be near her for conversation (*Ibn Ezra*).

This is derived from the expression לשכב אצלה to lie beside her rather than the usual expression for conjugal relations לשכב אתה or לשכב עמה lie with her (*Ramban*).

להיות עמה — To be with her.

— Alone (*Rashbam*).

— To consort with her (*Ibn Ezra*).

According to *Rashi* [following R'

Eleazar in *Sotah* 3b and *Avodah Zarah* 5a] the intent is that Joseph did not want to be with her in the World to Come.

— That is, he did not want his sin with her to 'attach itself to him like a dog' and accompany him in the Hereafter (*Gemara* *ibid.* as explained by *Maharsha* [cf. *Yoma* 35b]; or according to the *Midrash* he wanted neither to sinfully associate with her in this World or to accompany her to *Gehinom* which would be her portion in the World to Come.

11. ויהי כהיום הזה — Then there was an opportune day [lit. and it was like this day].

This translation follows *Rashi* (from *Sotah* 36b and *Tanchuma*). That is, on a certain famous, important, day — a festival when they all went to their temple. She, however, pleaded illness and stayed home, for she reasoned: I will never have such an opportunity to seduce Joseph היום הזה, as this day.

The intent, then, of the expression היום הזה [lit. like this day] is: on a day particularly suited for this purpose (*Mizrachi*); a day of which Potiphar's wife could say, 'Everyone is in the temple and I can be absolutely alone with him.' [See below s.v. ואין איש].

Radak: On a day like the one as that mentioned in v. 10 when she importuned him excessively.^[1]

the seductions of that woman [or is the Torah actually trying to conceal his sin with her]?

R' Yose took the Book of Genesis and read her the story of Reuben and Bilhah (35:22) and Judah and Tamar (chapt. 38).

'If the Torah did not conceal the sins of these — who were still under parental authority,' R' Yose said, 'how much the more would the Torah not conceal the sins of one who was but a slave in his master's house, and not subject to any parental control!'

'You are right, and your Torah is true!' she exclaimed (*Midrash HaGadol*).

1. R' *Hirsch* similarly explains that contextually, the expression like this day refers back to the phrase 'day by day' in the preceding verse; this day was like any other, when she pursued

her, to be with her.¹¹ Then there was an opportune day when he entered the house to do his work — no man of the household staff being there in the house

According to *Ibn Ezra* and *Ralbag*: On the anniversary of the first time — or the same day of the week or month — that she first began imploring him.

וַיָּבֹא הַכֹּהֵן לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכְתּוֹ — When [lit. and] he entered the house to do his work.

The Talmudic sages *Rav* and *Shmuel* differ: One maintains that Joseph entered the house with only the [innocent] intent of performing his household work, while the other maintains that [as a result of her ceaseless importunities, Joseph's resolve weakened and] his intended 'work' was to yield to her and satisfy his own desires. But when she caught hold of him by his garment [v. 12], his father's image appeared before him and immediately his desire left him (*Rashi*; *Sotah* 36b; see *comm.* to v. 8 above and to 49:22).¹¹

The sage who interprets that Joseph came to the house for immoral purposes apparently infers it from the expression to do his work — i.e., to satisfy his own lust and not to serve his master. The other opinion would, following *Tanchuma*, interpret his work literally, referring to a review of the account books (*Maharsha*, *Sotah* 36b).

him incessantly. Nevertheless though Joseph knew he would be alone with her and what to expect of her, Joseph still ventured into the house. The implication of this expression, therefore, would be one of reproach for Joseph. He voluntarily placed himself in a trying predicament for which he paid dearly. No man should depend too much on his moral strength and power of resistance.

1. The goal of a Jewish upbringing can be no better expressed than in the Midrashic account of Joseph's inner struggle against the temptation of Potiphar's wife. Joseph's will weakens and he is about to sin; his temptress is convinced she has finally seduced him. Just then, the sudden vision of his father gives him the strength to overcome his weakness and reassert his nature, now at the breaking point after months of heroic resistance. Such is the test of a child's upbringing. When his father's influence still guides him long after he has been separated from the family home and cast alone into a licentious society — then the training of his Jewish home has been fully vindicated (*R'Munk*). [See *Overview*.]

☞ This concept is illustrated by a story involving R' Yehoshua Trunk, the famous gaon of

Cf. *Onkelos* and *Targum Yonasan*: It was on a certain day that he entered the house to examine the tablets of his accounts.

It is not clear why the one who interprets Joseph's motive as lustful chose to reveal what the Torah, by use of the innocent term 'work', chose to conceal, especially since he could have interpreted the term literally.

Torah Temimah conjectures that possibly this interpretation is to Joseph's merit inasmuch as it emphasizes the full extent of Joseph's righteousness. He had come to the house ready to sin, yet was able to overpower his Evil Inclination and flee.

[Another reason for the interpretation might be the need to reconcile the tradition that Joseph was about to sin, with the simple flow of the narrative where Joseph's weakness is nowhere indicated. Apparently the only allusion to this in the text is the euphemistic use of the term 'his' work. See below for the source of the tradition that Jacob's image appeared and that Joseph's desire left him.]

[See *Shabbos* 49b where the Sages differ on whether or not the word מְלָאכָה in our verse denotes work and is to be counted among the thirty-nine times that forms of the word occur in the Torah.]

וְאֵין אִישׁ מֵאֲנָשֵׁי הַבַּיִת שָׁם בְּבֵית — [And] no man of the household staff [lit. men of the house] being there in the house.

How could it be that in such a large house there was not a single

וישב בְּבָגְדוֹ לֵאמֹר שִׁכְבָּה עִמִּי וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ
 לְט/יגִיד יִּבְדָּה וַיִּנָּס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה: וַיְהִי כִּרְאוֹתָהּ
 כִּי־עָזַב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיִּנָּס הַחוּצָה: וַתִּקְרָא

man? — It was, as noted, a festival and all were in their idolatrous temple (*Sotah* 36b cited by *Rashi* above).

According to the *Midrash*, the Nile overflowed its banks that day irrigating the land of Egypt and all except Joseph flocked to witness it and render homage to their gods. Alternately, there was a performance at the theater that day, and everyone flocked to see it.

As noted above, Potiphar's wife feigned illness on that particular day so she could remain home alone with Joseph who, she knew, had work to do.

According to *Sforno*, the passage means that no man was present in that particular room.

The expression *there was no man ... in the house* is also perceived in the *Midrash* to connote Joseph's realization that if he sinned with her, he would be like an animal, not a man. Immediately his desire left him, as if he lacked normal human impulses — so there was 'no man inside.'

Furthermore, the phrase of the men of the household is a limitation: There was no one there of the household but there was someone present who was not of the household. This is the basis of the Talmudic exegesis [*Sotah* 36b cited by *Rashi* above]

Kutna. Once while he was riding in a train, his neighbor was a non-observant young Jew who seemed to go out of his way to provoke the rabbi with his rude behavior. When R' Yehoshua chastised him, he replied,

"I don't need you to teach me how to behave," and to strengthen his point, he revealed that he was the descendant of distinguished rabbis.

R' Yehoshua replied, "King David had a son named Adoniyahu who was insolent and arrogant, and who came to a bad end when he tried to usurp the throne while his father lay on his death bed. Of Adoniyahu, Scripture says [I Kings 1:6] וְלֹא צָעָב אֲבִיו מִקִּדּוֹ [lit. and his father never caused him to feel sad]. This has a deeper meaning: the identity of his great and righteous father never saddened the wayward son; Adoniyahu was never saddened by the thought that his behavior would cause David intense humiliation. Because he failed to consider the obligations imposed by his august ancestry, Adoniyahu never relented from the behavior that led him to his doom. Joseph was different. Even after he had decided to let himself be seduced by Potiphar's wife, he did not forget that he was Jacob's son. When Joseph saw his father's image before him, he reconsidered immediately and fled from sin."

that Jacob's image appeared to Joseph (*Tur*).

12. — ותתפשטה בְּבָגְדוֹ לֵאמֹר [lit. and] she caught hold of him by his garment, saying 'Lie with me.'

She did not actually say so, but this was the clear implication of her seizure of his garment (*Or Ha-Chaim*; see *Likutei Anshei Shem* in *Chumash Rav Peninim*).

It is on this passage that the Talmud, *Sotah* 36b, cited by *Rashi* in the previous verse [and in the comm. to v. 8] remarks that Joseph resisted temptation when his father's countenance appeared through the window and admonished him that if he consorted with an adulteress, his name would be omitted from the High Priest's breastplate. [See *Oznaim laTorah*.]

Rabbi David Feinstein notes homiletically that בְּבָגְדוֹ, his garment, can be vocalized בְּבָגְדוֹ, his rebellion. Following the opinion in *Sotah* 36b that Joseph's resolve weakened and he was about to sin, our verse alludes to the fact that she made use of the opportunity: she caught hold of him בְּבָגְדוֹ, in his [moment of] rebellion.

The verb תִּשָּׁטַח denotes a more forceful, protracted grasp than אָחַז (*HaRechasim leBik'ah*).

וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ — But [lit. and] he

12-14 — ¹² that she caught hold of him by his garment saying, 'Lie with me!' But he left his garment in her hand, and he fled, going outside.

¹³ When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, ¹⁴ she called out to the men of

left his garment in her hand.

Out of courtesy to her as the wife of his master he did not overpower her and tear his garment from her. Instead he slipped out of it to elude her while she was still grasping it (Ramban).

וַיֵּצֵא וַיֵּלֶךְ — And he fled, going [lit. and went] outside.

He fled the room — lest his passions overcome him — and went outside. Once outside he slowed down and resumed his normal gait to avoid arousing curiosity (Sforno). [Comp. the phrase וַיֵּצֵא וַיֵּלֶךְ, and he fled outside in verses 13 and 18.]

R' Munk observes how, in choosing to flee rather than to remain and resist, Joseph teaches us an excellent lesson: To overcome a powerful temptation, it is best not to fight it but to flee from it.¹¹

- [See comm. to 14:11 for the distinction between the verbs וָיָסַח and וָיָסַח.]

The verb וָיָסַח, flee, occurs here, and in reference to the sea in Psalms 114:3: *The sea saw and fled* [וָיָסַח]. Midrash Tanchuma [Naso 30] and Daas Zekainim record: The Holy One, Blessed be He said, 'In reward for

your having fled, I promise that when your descendants leave Egypt the sea will flee because of your coffin [when your remains are brought back to Eretz Yisrael].' Thus, the verse reads *The sea saw and fled* — what did it see? It saw Joseph's remains, for God had declared that He would divide the sea for Joseph's sake.

13. Joseph is slandered.

When Potiphar's wife saw that he had left his garment and fled, she was afraid that he might expose her to the members of the household or to her husband. Anticipating this, she hurried to them first. She made a scene and accused him of having removed his garment to violate her, 'but when he saw that I screamed he fled in confusion' (Ramban).

According to B'chor Shor, she vindictively slandered him with the intent of gaining revenge and at the same time ridding herself of him. She realized she could not seduce him, but she could not control her passions in his presence. [See footnote to v. 1].

וַיֵּצֵא וַיֵּלֶךְ — And he fled outside.

Verse 12 reads: *He fled, going outside*, to intimate that when he

1. For Joseph's exemplary virtue and purity of conduct in the face of overwhelming temptation, the Sages consider him to have 'Sanctified the Name of Heaven in private' in reward for which R' Chanin observes [Sotah 10b and 36b] that one letter [א ה, he] from the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He was added to Joseph's name [see Psalms 81:6 where Joseph is spelled יְהוֹסֵף, Yehoseph].

Joseph's piety rightfully earned him the appellation יוֹסֵף הַצַּדִּיק, *Joseph the righteous*, a designation by which he is known throughout Rabbinic literature. On the Day of Judgment, Joseph's example of piety will refuse the excuse of the sensuous. For when the sensuous come before the Heavenly Court to be condemned for abandoning the Torah, they would justify themselves by saying: 'We were overcome by our beauty and were led astray by our passion.'

— 'And were you more beautiful than Joseph who was subjected to every possible attempt by Potiphar's wife to seduce him yet controlled his passions?' The Court would retort.

Kabbalistically Joseph the righteous is enumerated as one of the seven 'pillars' who, if it may be so expressed, 'support' the Divine Presence on earth (מְרַבְּנֵי לְשִׁכְנוֹתָּהּ).

לְאִנְשֵׁי בֵּיתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לֵאמֹר רְאוּ
הֵבִיא לָנוּ אִישׁ עֲבָדִי לְצַחֵק בָּנוּ כָּאִלּוּ

וַיֹּשֶׁב
לְטִיר

got outside he slowed down to avoid arousing curiosity. However, from her vantage point at this moment, she presumed that he kept running even while outside. She was apprehensive that the household people would ask him whom he was escaping and what had occurred, and that he might have told them. So she quickly took the following steps to counter him (*Sforno*).¹¹

Were it not for this apprehension she might otherwise have kept the matter secret (*Haamek Davar*).

I. The following chart compares the subtle differences in the account as it actually occurred and how Potiphar's wife reported it to the men of the household and subsequently to her husband.

The commentary deals with these nuances and their meaning.

Biblical Account (v. 14, 12)	Potiphar's wife's Perception (v. 13)	Potiphar's wife to the men of the household (v. 14-15)	Potiphar's wife to Potiphar (v. 17-18)
		הֵבִיא לָנוּ אִישׁ עֲבָדִי לְצַחֵק בָּנוּ כָּאִלּוּ לִשְׂכַב עִמִּי <i>He brought us a Hebrew man to sport with us; he came to me to lie with me</i>	כָּאִלּוּ הָעֶבֶר הָעֲבָדִי אֲשֶׁר-הֵבֵאתָ לָנוּ לְצַחֵק בִּי <i>came to me* the Hebrew slave whom you brought to us to sport with me</i>
וַתִּקְרָא לְאִנְשֵׁי בֵּיתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר וַתִּקְרָא <i>and she called to the men of her household</i>		וַתִּקְרָא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל וַתִּקְרָא <i>but I called out with a loud scream</i>	וַתִּקְרָא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל וַתִּקְרָא <i>as I raised my voice and called</i>
וַיַּעַזֵּב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיֵּצֵא <i>and he left his garment in her hand</i>	כִּי עָזַב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיֵּצֵא <i>that he left his garment beside her</i>	וַיַּעַזֵּב בְּגָדוֹ אֵצֶלִי וַיֵּצֵא <i>and he left his garment beside me</i>	וַיַּעַזֵּב בְּגָדוֹ אֵצֶלִי וַיֵּצֵא <i>and he left his garment beside me</i>
וַיֵּצֵא וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה וַיֵּצֵא <i>and he fled and went outside</i>	וַיֵּצֵא וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה וַיֵּצֵא <i>and he fled outside</i>	וַיֵּצֵא וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה וַיֵּצֵא <i>and he fled and went outside</i>	וַיֵּצֵא וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה וַיֵּצֵא <i>and he fled outside</i>

* (literal translation for purposes of comparison)

house? — She called out loudly, and when those outside heard her, they came into the house. It was to this calling that she referred in verses 15 and 18.

וְתֹאמַר לָהֶם לֵאמֹר — And said to them as follows [לֵאמֹר lit. to say.]

I.e., she knew that her husband might not believe her story so she summoned them that they too might rally behind her against this stranger; and as the superfluous word לֵאמֹר, to say, intimates, they in turn were to tell her husband when he would return (Rashi; Or HaChaim).

הֲאִן — Look! [lit. see!]

In the most simple sense, Look is meant idiomatically, not that she actually pointed at Joseph (Akeidah).

According to *Lekach Tov*, it is meant literally: she had Joseph brought before them and put on display that they might all attack him; according to *Abarbanel*, she held up his garment for all to see and thus verify her slander.

According to *Targum Yonasan* and *Zohar*, she tried to make it seem as though Joseph had succeeded in a forcible assault.

[Although *Ramban* does not cite the above opinion, the implication of his *comm.* to v. 19 is that Potiphar's wife would not have made such a claim, since her participation in an adultery act — even under duress — would have been loathsome in the eyes of her husband. Therefore, we see that she was careful to say that he came to lie with me, i.e. with the intention of violating her, but her screams caused him to flee.]

וְהָבִיא לָנוּ אִישׁ עִבְרִי — He brought us a Hebrew [יְהוּדִי] man.

Apparently Joseph had told them he was a Hebrew since he did not

want to be taken for a Canaanite (*Ramban* to 40:15).

We see from 43:32 the Egyptians abhorred the Hebrews and would not even eat with them. The Hebrews were given only field work and were never brought into the house. Therefore, Potiphar's wife charged that her husband's having brought a Hebrew slave into the house and appointing him to a position of trust was an affront to them. 'No wonder he took advantage of it and saw fit to exploit his position and trifle with our sensibilities!' (*Ramban*).

The phrase is elliptical. He brought us clearly refers to her husband although she does not mention him specifically by name (*Rashi*). [See *Rashi* to 41:13.]

She did not mention her husband explicitly either out of respect, or because it was self-evident that it was he who brought Joseph into the house (*Ramban*).

The term עִבְרִי, *Ivri* [=Hebrew] refers to one who hailed from the 'other side' (עֵבֶר ('ever')) of the River [Euphrates]. It also designates a descendant of Eber (*Rashi*).

Mizrachi explains that both of the above criteria are necessary for one to be called an *Ivri*, and as such only the Abrahamic family was so identified. The family of Nachor, Abraham's brother, was descended from Eber, but they never crossed the River; Ishmael and the children of Keturah are not termed *Ivri* — though they are of Abraham's family — because only Isaac is referred to as Abraham's offspring [21:13]. Similarly, though Esau was the child of Isaac, he was not called *Ivri* since the exegesis of 21:33 excluded him from being considered Abraham's offspring.

[See *comm.* to 14:13, *Ramban* to 40:15, and *comm.* to 43:32.]

וְלִצְחֵק בָּנוּ — To sport with us.

The verb לִצְחֵק, to sport, in this

וישב לו/ט-יז
 טו לשַׁכַּב עִמִּי וְאָקְרָא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל: וַיְהִי
 כְּשָׁמְעוּ כִּי־הִרְיַמְתִּי קוֹלִי וְאָקְרָא וַיַּעֲזֹב
 טז בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלִי וַיָּנֹס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה: וַתִּנָּח
 בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלָהּ עַד־בּוֹא אֲדֹנָיו אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ:
 י" וַתְּדַבֵּר אֵלָיו בְּדִבְרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵּאמֹר בָּא
 אֵלַי הָעֶבֶד הָעֶבְרִי אֲשֶׁר־הִבֵּאתָ לָנוּ

context denotes *adultery*, as *Rashi* explains the various meanings of the word in 21:9.

The connotation of the verb according to *Ramban*, is to *assume airs* or to *mock*, while *Sforno* interprets it as 'playing' in a manner that made his immoral intentions obvious.

She used the plural *us*, as the plural of majesty (*Radak*), while according to *Yalkut*, the plural refers also to the other women of the household whom she coached to testify that Joseph tried to seduce them as well.¹¹

וְאָקְרָא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל — But [lit. and] I cried out with a loud scream.

You were far away from me and I had to scream aloud; had I not done so, he would have forcibly violated me (*Rashbam*).

But, as noted in *Ramban* to v. 19, she was careful to stress that Joseph only *attempted* to lie with her, but that her screams caused him to flee.

1. According to *Alshich* and *Abarbanel* — echoed by *Malbim* — she used the plural *us* to arouse their hostility against Joseph, the stranger, a Hebrew, and conjure up an image of him as the common enemy of them all. 'The Hebrew stranger has mocked not only *me*, but *all of us* — the whole Egyptian nation!'

Note that she was addressing her slaves when she stated this. When she repeated the incident to her husband [v. 15], she refers to Joseph as a Hebrew *slave*, but in addressing the other slaves, she wants to avoid their feeling a sense of solidarity with Joseph as one of them. Were they to think of him as one of them, it would be natural for downtrodden slaves to side with a fellow sufferer. So she subtly cleverly described Joseph as the Hebrew *man* — an overlord over them, and hence their common enemy — who arrogantly mocked *them* by his attempted seduction of her, for although *she* was his intended victim this time, he would treat them *all* the same way should the opportunity present itself.

So throughout history have anti-Semites furthered their own self-interest by arousing the citizenry's ire against their 'common enemy' — the Jew, the stranger in their midst — by slander and lies that led to the shedding of innocent blood.

She carefully avoided any suggestion that Joseph had been successful in his attempts, for her participation — even under duress — in an act of adultery would have been too loathsome in her husband's eyes. In any case, there was no need to carry her fabrication so far, since even Joseph's *attempt* to violate her was sufficient to earn him the death penalty.

[Her calling out to summon the men of the household *after* Joseph had fled (v. 14) is the only calling out recorded in this incident (see *Radak* *ibid*). In order to absolve herself from suspicion of complicity, she emphasizes both to her slaves and subsequently to her husband (v. 18) that she did indeed cry out — implicitly *during* the attack (cf. *Deut.* 22:24).]

15. [And] he left his garment beside me.

Note the subtle change: She did not say, 'he left his garment in my hand' [as had actually occurred (v.

39 to lie with me but I called out with a loud scream.
15-17 ¹⁵ And when he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me, fled, and went outside!

¹⁶ She kept his garment beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she told him a similar account saying, 'The Hebrew slave whom you brought to us

12), since that would implicate her as having seized him]. Instead she told the people of her household and her husband that Joseph left his garment *beside* her [intimating that he left it in the midst of disrobing], when he fled upon being panicked by her screams (Ramban).

וַיָּנֶס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה — [And] he fled, and went outside.

In v. 12, the passage reads similarly. *Sforno* explains that Joseph ran only until he was out of the room; then he slowed down to a normal walk. She probably realized that Joseph had not run to report the incident to his fellow servants. Therefore she reported — accurately — to the bystanders that he had run for only a short while. But when she repeated her account to Potiphar who had not been there [v. 18] she said וַיָּנֶס הַחוּצָה, *he fled outside*, — implying that he kept running when he was outside too [to arouse the curiosity of bystanders and slander her].

16. וַתֵּן בְּגָדוֹ אֵצֶלָה — [And] she kept his garment beside her.

— As evidence (Abarbanel).

— Kissing and fondling it all the while (Midrash).

עַד בּוֹא אֲדֹנָיו אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ — Until his master [i.e. Joseph's master (Rashi)] came home [lit. to his house].

17. Potiphar's wife proceeds to repeat her vindictive slander to her

husband, repeating the accusation to him in great detail.

בָּא אֵלַי ... לְצַחֵק בִּי — Came to me to sport with me.

The Hebrew literally reads, *came to me the Hebrew slave whom you brought to us to sport with her*. *Rashi* wishes to negate the false inference that she suggested that Potiphar purposely brought the Hebrew slave to sport with her. Therefore, for the purpose of clearer understanding, *Rashi* interprets the syntax, and our translation follows him: *The Hebrew slave whom you brought to us came to me to sport with me*.

Why, then, did the Torah construct the phrase in so ambiguous a manner?

Potiphar's wife was suggesting to her husband that by placing such an attractive slave boy in the household, he had created a situation filled with unbearable temptation. Indeed, it was truly as if Potiphar had brought Joseph to sport with her (Rabbi David Feinstein).

הַעֲבָדִי הָעִבְרִי — The Hebrew slave.

[In her account to her slaves she did not refer to Joseph as a slave but simply as the Hebrew man. See comm. to v. 14 s.v. הָעִבְרִי.]

She intimated to her husband that as a mere slave, Joseph should have displayed the utmost respect for her (Haamek Davar).

אֲשֶׁר הָבֵאתָ לָנוּ — Whom you brought to us.

Your very act of bringing such a

וַיֵּשֶׁב יוֹשֵׁף בְּעֵינָיו בְּהָרִימִי קוֹלִי וְאֶקְרָא
 לְט/יח-כ וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלִי וַיָּנֶס הַחוּצָה: וַיְהִי
 כִּשְׁמַע אֲדֹנָיו אֶת־דִּבְרֵי אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר
 דִּבְרָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר בְּדַבְרִים הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה
 כ לִּי עֲבָדָה וַיַּחַר אָפוֹ: וַיִּקַּח אֲדֹנָי יוֹסֵף
 אֹתוֹ וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ אֶל־בֵּית הַסֵּהָר מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־
 אֲסִירֵי ק' אֲסוּרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲסוּרִים וַיְהִי־שָׁם בְּבֵית

person into our house was abhorrent! (Ramban v. 14).

18. וַיָּנֶס הַחוּצָה. — *And ran outside.*

[I.e. he did not even have the decency to slow down when he got outside, but kept running to arouse the curiosity of the servants and cast aspersions upon me.]

(See *Sforno* to v. 12 and 15).

19. וַיְהִי כִשְׁמַע אֲדֹנָיו אֶת דִּבְרֵי אִשְׁתּוֹ — *And it was, when his master heard his wife's words.*

— Emphasizing the gravity of Joseph's affront (*Ralbag*).

בְּדַבְרִים הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה לִּי עֲבָדָה — *Your slave did things like these to me.*

She told this to Potiphar at the time of conjugal intimacy. Therefore she specifically stated, 'your servant did the kind of things you are doing right now!' (*Rashi*).

Although the Rabbinic view is that Potiphar was a castrate (see *uss.* 1 and 6), this did not preclude his ability to be intimate in some ways with his wife (*Mizrachi*).

Ramban maintains that *Rashi's* Midrashic exegesis is inspired by the expression בְּדַבְרִים הָאֵלֶּה, *things like these*, i.e., matters of intimacy as they themselves were then engaged in.

Ramban maintains however that in the literal sense all of this is academic since the prefix בְּ דַבְרִים הָאֵלֶּה in כ כ does not denote an exact comparison i.e., *these very things*, but merely indicates an approximation, being the idiomatic equivalent of הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, *similar* [lit. *these*] things. Or the כ indicates exaggeration, i.e. *things as terrible as these*.

— *And his anger flared up.*

— At Joseph. However, Potiphar did not have Joseph killed either because of his great love for him; or it was a miracle; or because he doubted her story in view of Joseph's righteousness. The Sages in the *Midrash* similarly interpreted this matter [see *Midrash* next verse] (*Ibn Ezra; Ramban*).

There is an opinion in the *Yalkut* that Potiphar was ready to kill Joseph, but his daughter Asenath came to him and swore that Joseph was innocent. She told her father the entire story as it actually happened. It was in the merit of this that she was eventually privileged to marry him [see 41:50].

According to *Sforno*, Potiphar's anger was directed at *his wife* for having publicly complained about his bringing a Hebrew slave into the house to sport with her. The accusation itself, however, he disbelieved.

— He was angry at the turn of events that mandated that he could no longer retain Joseph in his household service (*Malbim*).

The expression וַיַּחַר אָפוֹ idiomatically describes *fierce anger*. It metaphorically means: *and his nostrils flared*. See *comm.* to 30:2.

20. וַיִּקַּח אֲדֹנָי יוֹסֵף אֹתוֹ — *Then [lit. and] Joseph's master took him.*

came to me to sport with me. ¹⁸ But it happened that when I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me, and ran outside.'

¹⁹ And it was, when his master heard his wife's words which she spoke to him saying, 'Your slave did things like these to me,' and his anger flared up.

²⁰ Then Joseph's master took him and placed him in the prison — the place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he remained there in the prison.

This, too, was a display of Potiphar's love for Joseph: Potiphar himself took Joseph and did not summon the prison officials (*Abarbanel*; *Malbim*).

'I know the charge against you is false,' Potiphar said to Joseph, 'but I must imprison you lest a stigma fall on my children' [i.e., 'I must punish you to demonstrate that I believe my wife's assertion that you seduced her and not *vice-versa* or else people will say that she acted the same way with others, and our children are not mine.' Had Potiphar believed Joseph to be guilty he would certainly have put him to death (*Yafeh Toar*)] (*Midrash*; *Ramban*).^[1]

On the plural construct form for *master* אֲדֹנָי rather than the singular אֲדֹנִי, see *Rashi* to 35:7 and above v. 2.

וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ אֶל-בֵּית הַסֵּהַר מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲסוּרִים הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲסוּרִים — And he placed [lit. gave] him in [lit. to] the prison [Hebrew: *beth hasohar*] — the

place where the king's prisoners were confined [lit. bound].

The word *sohar* is an Egyptian word and therefore the Torah itself goes on to define that a *beth hasohar* is the place where the king's prisoners were confined. This is in keeping with the Scriptural style of defining foreign words, as in *Esther* 3:7: They cast 'pur,' that is the lot (*Ibn Ezra*).

Ramban disagrees and maintains that *sohar* is a dungeon [see below], and the reason the Torah provides us with the qualifying phrase *the place where the king's prisoners were confined* is to demonstrate how this was yet another example of God's graciousness toward Joseph: Because of Potiphar's Divinely inspired love for Joseph, he did not imprison him with common criminals, but with the king's prisoners, i.e., officials who sinned against the king. By telling us this, the Torah also prepares us for the

1. By presenting us in detail with a revolting injustice arising from the accusation of a slanderer, the Torah portrays for coming generations the destiny of the people of Israel. But Joseph accepts this new ordeal just as calmly as he had accepted the fierce hatred of his brothers and his descent to slavery. He did not indulge in useless protestations of innocence nor did he cry out in rebellion. He accepted the unjust imprisonment for twelve years.

However, even during this long period of incarceration, his exemplary conduct would gain him high honors. All would regard him as entirely cleansed of the false and shameful accusations; this former slave, thrown into a dungeon, would ultimately rise to glory.

Such is the reaction of the just and pious man who can overcome all hardships, whatever the circumstances. Joseph's attitude serves as an inspiration to future generations facing similar situations (*R' Munk*).

וישב כא הסהר: ניהי יהוה את־יוסף ויט אליו
 לט/כא-כג חסד ניתן חנו בעיני שר בית־הסהר:
 כב ניתן שר בית־הסהר ביד־יוסף את כל־
 האסירים אשר בבית הסהר ואת כל־
 כג אשר עשים שם הוא היה עשה: אין |
 שר בית־הסהר ראה את־כל־מאומה

fact that the royal butler and baker were imprisoned with him. [See *Meshech Chochmah*.]

Since Potiphar was the שר, chief executioner [see *comm.* to v. 1 and 37:36], he was in full charge of this prison and had the authority to incarcerate Joseph there. [See 40:3] (*Haamek Davar*).

Radak in *Shorashim* relates the word סהר to *Song of Songs* 7:3 where it has the meaning of roundness, and explains that בית הסהר lit. house of roundness refers to a circular tower which they used as prisons.

Ramban explains it as an underground dungeon with an overhead opening through which they lowered the prisoners and through which the prisoners had light. The word סהר is related to the Aramaic סיהרא, dim light. [*Onkelos* renders 'moon' with the word סיהרא, and is related etymologically to the Hebrew term צהר, light, from צהרים, midday, when light reaches its zenith. However, by distinction, סהר denotes the faint light that percolated into the dungeon.

R' Hirsch notes that the Traditional spelling אסירי is (קתיב) while the pronunciation אסירי (קרי) The two words have different connotations. The first, אסירי is a verb, the imprisoned, implying that although the people were confined in jail, they could not be called 'prisoners' for they had not been convicted of a crime; they were being held for trial. The latter word אסירי, however, is a noun; prisoners, implying that they had already been convicted of the crime for which they were imprisoned. The dual nature of the word indicates that both categories of people were there: convicts like Joseph and people like the chamberlain of the

cupbearers and the baker whose acquaintance Joseph was to make in the next chapter.

The passage literally reads and gave [or placed] him to, the prison. The expression to the prison is synonymous with in the prison. Cf. *Exodus* 25:21 to the ark=in the ark (*Radak*).

— ניהי שם בבית הסהר — And he remained [lit. was] there in the prison.

— Potiphar would not change his mind and liberate him (*Radak*).

Joseph was incarcerated there a total of twelve years: Ten years — one for each of the ten brothers about whom he had brought evil reports [37:2] — plus two more in punishment for having placed his trust in the chamberlain of the cupbearers instead of in God alone [see *comm.* to 40:14 and 41:1] (*Seder Olam*; *Tanchuma*; *Shmos Rabbah* 7:1).

21. — ניהי ה' את יוסף. [And] HASHEM was with Joseph.

— Even in prison. This was yet a further manifestation of God's grace, for whenever an individual of Israel suffers bondage, the Shechinah accompanies him, if one may so express it, as it is written: [*Psalms* 91:15] I [God] will be with him in trouble (*Mechilta*).

— ויט אליו חסד — And He endowed him with charisma [lit. and He extended charm to him].

God caused Joseph to be liked by

- 21 HASHEM was with Joseph, and He endowed him with charisma; He made the prison warden view him favorably. 22 The prison warden placed all inmates of the prison in Joseph's custody, and everything that was done there, he would accomplish. 23 The prison warden did not scrutinize anything that was in his

all who saw him. We find the word חסד [in this sense of *charisma*] in the Talmudic expression [Kesubos 17a] בָּלָה נָאָה וְחִסְדָּהּ, 'a handsome bride liked by all' (Rashi).

Normally, prisoners are the dregs of society, and the whole concept of emotion or affection is absent among them. In Joseph's case, however, Providence specifically ordained that all the prisoners took a special liking for him (Haamek Davar).

— HASHEM endowed Joseph with an aura of innocence (Malbim).

וַיִּתֵּן חֲנוּן בְּעֵינֵי שַׂר בֵּית־הַסֵּהרָ [And] He made the prison warden view him favorably [lit. and He gave his grace in the eyes of the official of the prison].

I.e. this was the specific way in which God extended grace or charisma to him (Akeidah).

וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂים שָׁם הוּא הָיָה עֹשֶׂה — And everything that was done [lit. that they do] there, he would accomplish [lit. he was the doer].

[I.e. he was in authority to have it accomplished;] as Onkelos renders: it was done at his command (Rashi).

Although the literal meaning of the phrase indicates that Joseph was the doer of all the work, the context of the verse makes this interpretation impossible. If the warden liked Joseph enough to put him in charge of all the prisoners, he could hardly have expected Joseph to do all the work. Instead, Rashi interprets 'doer' in the sense of God's command to Moses: וְשִׁיתָ מִנְּרוֹת זָהָב, you are to

make a golden menorah; the physical work was to be done by Bezalel, but Moses had responsibility for it (Mizrachi).

Tur cites an opinion that this phrase intimates how Joseph supported himself by plying a trade as did the other prisoners.

R' Hirsch offers an alternate interpretation: what previously a number of prisoners had to do, Joseph did himself.

Haamek Davar notes how the verb עָשָׂה denotes putting an object into its final form [see Ramban to 1:7]. Hence this passage informs us that Joseph was the one to arrange for the sale of the crafts that the prisoners fashioned in prison, this being the ultimate purpose of their labor.

23. אֵין שַׂר בֵּית־הַסֵּהרָ רָאָה אֶת־כָּל־מֵאֻמָּה בְּיָדוֹ — The prison warden did not scrutinize anything that was in his [Joseph's] charge [lit. the warden of the prison does not see anything at all in his hand].

The translation of *supervise* for רָאָה, see, follows Raibag.

The warden of the prison never demanded an accounting of Joseph nor did he guard him. He realized that Joseph was innocent, that HASHEM was with him, and that HASHEM made him succeed in everything he undertook (Targum Yonasan).

According to Haamek Davar, the intimation is that the warden scrutinized Joseph carefully since he felt that it was not for naught that his master had incarcerated such an apparently capable servant. But this verse informs us, that

בִּידוֹ בְּאֶשֶׁר יְהוָה אִתּוֹ וְאֶשֶׁר-הוּא עֹשֶׂה
יְהוָה מַצְלִיחַ:

וישב
מ/א

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה חָטְאוּ מִשְׁקָה
מֶלֶךְ-מִצְרַיִם וְהָאִפָּה לְאֲדֹנֵיהֶם לְמֶלֶךְ

the warden was unable to detect anything adverse in Joseph. He therefore concluded, as the verse proceeds to inform us, that Joseph's perfection was *אִתּוֹ בְּאֶשֶׁר ה' עֹשֶׂה*, *Inasmuch as HASHEM was with him*, i.e., due to God's assistance.

Inasmuch as — *בְּאֶשֶׁר ה' אִתּוֹ* HASHEM was with him.

The translation of *בְּאֶשֶׁר* as *inasmuch* follows Rashi.

And — *וְאֶשֶׁר הוּא עֹשֶׂה ה' מַצְלִיחַ*

whatever he did HASHEM made successful.

Joseph's success was extraordinary. Accordingly, it was obvious that HASHEM was with him because of his righteousness (*Haamek Davar*).

This is a general statement. Not only in prison, but at *all* times — even when he later rose to greatness and prosperity — HASHEM was with him and made him prosper (*Midrash*).

XL

1. Joseph interprets dreams in prison.

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה — *And it happened after these things.*

[This expression, as distinct from the expression *וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי כֵן*, signifies that an occurrence about to be related followed soon after the preceding event, or resulted directly from it. (See *Rashi* to 39:7 and *Mizrachi* cited in *comm.* to 22:20). Since this expression is used to introduce the imprisonment of Phar-

ah's two courtiers, the imprisonment is accordingly perceived as a direct result of the incident just related — the scandal maliciously engineered by Potiphar's wife]:

— Because Potiphar's accused wife^[1] had made Joseph the subject of general gossip, God now arranged for a new scandal: He brought about the offenses of these men [prominent officials of the royal palace] so that people's attention should be diverted to them and

1. Although in 39:1 *Rashi* refers to the 'purity' of Potiphar's wife's intention, nevertheless here he calls her *אֲרוּרָה*, *accursed*.

Perhaps, like Tamar, her *intentions* were noble, but, unlike Tamar, her method was misguided. Tamar acted within the law in seeking to have a child by the righteous Judah, for, as noted in the *comm.* to 38:8, Judah was the next of kin upon whom it was incumbent to 'redeem' Tamar in levirate marriage; her method, though it seemed to be an act of prostitution, was not adulterous.

Potiphar's wife, on the other hand, allowed her noble intentions to justify any means, no matter how forbidden. She, too, wanted a child by a righteous man, Joseph, but she followed her evil inclination to entice Joseph into depraved adultery. It was only by Joseph's exemplary resistance that her evil plans did not come to fruition. Thus, *Rashi's* designation of her, as 'accursed' is in the light of her deeds, not her aspirations — it portrays the Rabbinic perspective of that evil woman, and is not inconsistent with his earlier evaluation of her motives. [Cf. footnote to 39:1]

charge inasmuch as *HASHEM* was with him. And whatever he did *HASHEM* made successful.

And it happened after these things that the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and the baker transgressed against their master, against the king of

away from Joseph. God's other purpose [in causing the officials' offense and imprisonment] was to make Joseph's relief [and ultimate elevation to a high position] occur through them (*Rashi*).

Rashi is drawn to the latter reason because the imprisonment of only one royal official would have sufficed if God's intention had been to divert attention from Joseph. That two officials were imprisoned is perceived as setting the stage of Joseph's rise to prominence. Two people were needed because Joseph's diametrically opposed interpretations of their dreams proved his veracity beyond doubt (*Gur Aryeh*; comp. *Malbim*). [Furthermore, *Rashi* might have been drawn to the second interpretation because there was a lapse of many years between the two events.]

הָטָאוּ מִשְׁקָה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וְהָאֶפֶס —
That the cupbearer of the king of
Egypt and the baker transgressed.

[By performing their duties unsatisfactorily]:

-- In the case of one, a fly was found in his goblet of wine, while in the case of the other, a pebble was discovered in his bread (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).¹¹

This Rabbinic tradition cited by *Rashi* explains why the cupbearer was ultimately restored to his former position [v. 21] while the baker was put to death. The cupbearer's offense was less

serious than that of the baker, since a fly could have fallen in at any time, and presumably was not in the goblet when the cupbearer originally prepared and served it. The baker, however, was guilty of negligence since a pebble must have been in the dough or oven all along (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*. See *Gittin* 6b for an analogy).

Furthermore, the presence of a pebble was a more serious offense since it could have choked Pharaoh, whereas the presence of a dead fly, while repulsive, is harmless (*Radal*).

In general, the Rabbinic tradition that these offenses involved the respective foods of which they were in charge is inspired by the fact that the Torah — which economizes on its every word — found it necessary to mention the occupation of these two officers, thus intimating that this was relevant to their offense (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Rashi notes that the noun אֶפֶס, baker, refers specifically to the baker of bread since Scripture uses the root אָפַק, bake, only in that sense.

According to *Sforno* and many other commentators, the respective offenses were committed by *underlings* of the two chamberlains, but the chamberlains themselves were held responsible for not exercising proper supervision. [See *Malbim* cited in footnote next page.]

לְאֶרְנֵיהֶם לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם — Against [lit. to] their master, against [lit. to] the king of Egypt.

1. There is another Midrashic opinion that these officials were accused of plotting to poison Pharaoh. They allegedly conspired to place a fatal dose in his wine and in his bread (*Targum Yonasan*). According to *Yafeh Toar* the king was saved only because Providence caused him to discover a fly in his wine and pebble in his bread.

According to another view in the *Midrash*, they planned to seduce the king's daughter. This is suggested by analogy with 39:9 where the same term חָטָא, sin, is used to denote a sexual offense.

The prevalent Rabbinic opinion, however, is that there was no conspiracy. Providence merely arranged the fly in the wine and the pebble in the bread to precipitate the chain of events which led to Joseph's elevation to greatness.

וישב מ-ב-ג
 ב מִצְרַיִם: וַיִּקְצֹף פָּרְעֹה עַל שְׁנֵי סֹרִיסָיו
 ג עַל שֵׁר הַמִּשְׁקִים וְעַל שֵׁר הָאוֹפִים: וַיִּתֵּן
 אֹתָם בַּמִּשְׁמֶר בֵּית שֵׁר הַטְּבָחִים אֶל-בֵּית
 הַסֵּהר מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יוֹסֵף אָסוּר שָׁם:

— I.e., in their duties to their master (*Midrash*).

The redundant terms are used to emphasize that their offense was all the more serious because it affected the king of Egypt (*Malbim*).

Some commentators hold that *their master* is not identical with the king of Egypt. Instead, the verse divides the offense into two steps: the servants of the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers and of the Chamberlain of the Bakers were guilty of malfeasance to their masters, the respective chamberlains. These misdeeds, in turn, constituted crimes against the king of Egypt. Therefore, although ordinary servants were responsible, the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers and Chamberlain of the Bakers were jailed (v. 2); they were held responsible for not supervising their subordinates properly. [Cf. *Sforno* cited above].^[1]

2. וַיִּקְצֹף פָּרְעֹה עַל שְׁנֵי סֹרִיסָיו — [And] Pharaoh was enraged at his two courtiers.

This was part of the Divine plan. God caused Pharaoh to be incensed at his two courtiers in order to engineer the rise of Joseph to greatness. Similarly, the Sages perceive that God engineered the rise of Mordechai through Ahasuerus's wrath (קֶצֶף) at Bigsan and Teresh [*Esther* 2:21] (*Midrash; Lekach Tov*; cf. *Megillah* 13b).

The translation of סֹרִיסָיו as *courtiers* follows the rendering of *Onkelos* (רַבֵּינְנוּהִי). The term is discussed in the *comm.* to 37:36 and 39:1.

Ramban maintains that these officials were called סֹרִיסִים which literally means *eunuchs*, since their duties required them to go into the women's quarters of the royal palace, and the kings would customarily castrate them.

עַל שֵׁר הַמִּשְׁקִים וְעַל שֵׁר הָאוֹפִים — [Upon] the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers and [upon] the Chamberlain of the Bakers.

— For having improperly supervised their subordinates (see *Sforno*

1. *Malbim* pursues this interpretation, but goes a step further. It is true that in terms of their supervisory obligations, the cupbearer was less delinquent than the baker because the presence of a fly is accidental. However, from a different viewpoint, the cupbearer was the more guilty party. For [as is clear from v. 13] the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers was the courtier who actually handed the cup to Pharaoh — he should have noticed at the last moment that something had fallen into Pharaoh's drink, something that was impossible for the Chamberlain of the Bakers who could not know that a loaf contained a pebble. Therefore, the personal guilt of the cupbearer was the greater of the two. Accordingly, in v. 2, the king's wrath was first primarily on the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers and secondarily upon the Chamberlain of the Bakers.

Viewed from this perspective, Pharaoh would have been more likely to show mercy to the baker, whose guilt was indirect. Had Joseph interpreted the dreams that way and such been Pharaoh's decision, no one would have taken Joseph's role seriously, because his interpretation of the dreams would have demonstrated simple common sense rather than great incisiveness or supernatural powers. That events followed a different course is further proof that Providence ordered history so that Joseph would be elevated to greatness.

Egypt. ² Pharaoh was enraged at his two courtiers, the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers and the Chamberlain of the Bakers. ³ And he placed them in the ward of the house of the Chamberlain of the Butchers, into the prison, the place where Joseph

above, v. 1 and footnote there).

However, most commentators maintain that the people designated simply as *cupbearer* and *baker* in verses 1 and 5 are identical with those designated as *chamberlain* in this verse. They *themselves* sinned and were now incarcerated.

R' Hirsch explains that the difference in the Torah's designation of them first simply by their respective designations as *cupbearer* and *baker* and then as *chamberlains*. To the masses they were *שרים*, *chamberlains*, whom the king honored with his favor, while to the king [as reflected in this verse] they were nothing more than *קוֹיִסִי*, *courtiers* [literally *castrates*]. Like the most inconsequential slave, they were his powerless chattels whom he could have thrown into a dungeon at his slightest whim. [Comp. *Kli Yakar*].

3. וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם – And he placed them.

I.e., ordered them placed (*Ralbag*).

R' Hirsch [to v. 7] observes how in imprisoning his offensive chamberlains Pharaoh acted differently from his later Persian counterpart, Ahasuerus, who executed offending officials [cf. *Esther* 2:23]. Pharaoh's less impetuous behavior was an integral stitch in the intricate Providential fabric being woven.

בְּמִשְׁמַר בֵּית שֹׂר הַבָּשָׂרִים אֶל־בֵּית הַסֵּהָר
— In the ward of the house of the Chamberlain of the Butchers [or Chamberlain of the Executioners (see above)], into the prison.

In the ward — i.e., a place where

they could be guarded from escaping (*Ibn Ezra*).

Their incarceration was for the purpose of detaining them pending sentence. This is derived from the case of the blasphemer [*Leviticus* 24:12] and the man who gathered wood on the Sabbath [*ibid.* 15:34] both of whom were held — in the case of the former, so that his punishment might be declared to them by the mouth of HASHEM [*Lev.* 24:12], and in the case of the latter, because it had not been declared what should be done to him [*Numbers* 15:34] (*Bereishis Rabbosi*).

As this verse makes plain, Potiphar was in charge of this ward, as it was in part of his home (*Ibn Ezra*; *Akeidah*).

This passage would tend to strengthen *Onkelos* and *Ramban's* interpretation that שֹׂר הַבָּשָׂרִים means *Chamberlain of the Executioners* who was also in charge of the prisoners awaiting sentencing. But according to *Rashi's* interpretation in 37:36 and 39:1 that it means *Chamberlain of the Butchers*, it seems difficult that he would have anything to do with condemned prisoners (*Ibn Caspi*).

מָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יוֹסֵף אֶסֶר שָׁם — The place where Joseph was confined [see above].

We are given this information to prepare us for the narrative which follows (*Radak*).

It was a further manifestation of God's Providence that these prisoners were guided to the very ward

וַיִּפְקֹד שָׂר הַטִּבָּחִים אֶת־יוֹסֵף אֹתָם
וַיִּשְׂרֹת אֹתָם וַיְהִי יָמִים בְּמִשְׁמָר:
וַיַּחְלְמוּ חֲלוֹם שְׁנֵיהֶם אִישׁ חֲלֹמוֹ בְּלֵילָה
אֶחָד אִישׁ בְּפִתְרוֹן חֲלֹמוֹ הִמְשָׁקָה

וישב
מ/ד-ה

of the prison where Joseph, too, was confined (*Malbim*).

All of these circumlocutions took place in order to cause Jacob's eventual descent into Egypt and begin the foretold exile (*R' Bachya*).

4. וַיִּפְקֹד שָׂר הַטִּבָּחִים אֶת יוֹסֵף אֹתָם – *The Chamberlain of the Butchers [or: Executioners] appointed Joseph [or: be] with them.*

The translation appointed follows *Rashi*: Joseph was appointed to serve them. As a gesture of courtesy on Potiphar's part to his fallen colleagues, he selected his foremost servant to be their attendant (*Gur Aryeh*; *Tzeidah la-Derech*; cf. *Ibn Ezra*).

וַיִּשְׂרֹת אֹתָם – *And he attended them.*

That Joseph was brought into personal contact with the individuals through whom he would ultimately be liberated, was yet another facet of the guiding hand of Providence (*Abarbanel*; *Malbim*).

וַיְהִי יָמִים בְּמִשְׁמָר – *And they remained in the ward [for a period of] days.*

Twelve months (*Rashi*).^[1]

Joseph's long period of incarceration together with political prisoners during which time he had the opportunity of gaining their trust and learning about the intimate workings of government was also part of the Divine scheme. Joseph's association with them benefited him in later years when he controlled the government of Egypt (*Abarbanel*).

5. The dreams of the chamberlains.

[On the veracity of dreams in Scripture as prognostications of the future and a determining influence, see *comm.* to 28:12; 37:5 and *Overview*.]

וַיַּחְלְמוּ חֲלוֹם שְׁנֵיהֶם – *The two of them had dreamt a dream.*

— This translation based upon *Rashi* follows the simple sense of the Hebrew which literally reads: *and they dreamt a dream the two of them* [i.e., that the two of them is the subject of they dreamt; see *Ramban* below s.v. *הַמְשָׁקָה*.]

Midrashically [the word חֲלוֹם is interpreted in the construct state and] the phrase is rendered: *They dreamt the dream of both of them, i.e., each of them dreamt his own*

1. This interpretation of *days* as meaning *one year* is derived by analogy [*gezerah shavah*] from Lev. 25:29: וַיָּמִין תְּהִיָּה נְאֻלָּתוֹ יָמִים, *for a 'full year' [יָמִים] shall he have the right of redemption*. In that passage, as explained in *Kesubos* 57b, יָמִים, *days*, has the meaning of *year*. As the *Gemara* *ibid.* explains, we do not compare our verse to *Numbers* 11:20 חֹדֶשׁ יָמִים lit. *a month of days*, since we may draw an analogy only from a parallel verse where יָמִים is left undefined, not from a passage which specifies its meaning as a *month* (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*. See *Rashi* above 24:55).

The implication is that within three days — at Pharaoh's birthday — they will have been imprisoned for a *total* period of one year — a full cycle of days. It emerges that they were imprisoned a year earlier on Pharaoh's birthday, and their fate determined a full year later to the day (*R' David Feinstein*).

was confined. ⁴ The Chamberlain of the Butchers appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them and they remained in the ward for a period of days.

⁵ The two of them dreamt a dream, each one had his dream on the same night, each one according to the interpretation of his dream — the cupbearer and

dream as well as the interpretation of the other's dream. This is the meaning of v. 16 which states that the Chamberlain of the Bakers saw that he [Joseph] had interpreted well. [Unless the baker had dreamt that the cupbearer would indeed be reappointed to serve Pharaoh, how could he have known that Joseph's interpretation was correct? (Mizrachi; Gur Aryeh).] [Cf. Midrash and Berachos 55b.]

Abarbanel observes that sometimes Scripture refers to the dreams in the singular, as in our phrase, חלום, as if they were one dream. This is because the symbolism of the two dreams was so similar that they both seemed to have the same meaning although it was only natural that each dreamt in terms of his own occupation. Only when Joseph enlightened them did they realize that the dreams were distinct.

איש חלמו בלילה אחד — Each one had his dream on the same night [lit. man his dream on one night].

— A further omen that their dreams were not coincidence or mere fantasy (Malbim).

As R' Hirsch explains, there was nothing extraordinary in a prisoner dreaming that he had been freed and was back at the occupation he had been performing for many years. Rather they were struck by the similarity of both dreams on the same night. [See continuation of this comment below.]

Oznaim l'Torah mentions that that

evening was the first of Tishrei, Rosh HaShanah. Since the fate of men and nations is determined on that day (a fact apparently recognized even by the gentiles in those times), they gave special emphasis to the omens contained in their dreams as portents of the fates awaiting them in the coming year. [See his comm. to 41:1; cf. Rosh HaShanah 10a; comp. also Maharsha to Berachos 55b that dreams dreamt on Rosh HaShanah are auspicious.]

איש כפתרון חלמו — Each one [lit. man] according to the interpretation of his dream.

Each dream was consistent with the interpretation which foretold what would befall the dreamer (Rashi).

That is, the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers dreamed of wine, the symbol of joy, while the Chamberlain of the Bakers dreamed of a bird snatching the food he was bringing to the king, an event portending grief (Tur).

This does not suggest that they were aware of the respective interpretations at the time. Rather, the Torah is thus informing us that in retrospect it would become apparent that each dream was consistent with what the future held — as later interpreted by Joseph (Sefer HaZikaron; Devek Tov).

As Ibn Ezra (explained by Ramban) and Radak interpret, each dream contained an accurate vision of the future, verifying that it was a true dream — not the kind which one fantasizes as the result of anxiety and of which only a part is fulfilled. Cf. Rashbam: Each dreamed a dream worthy of interpreta-

והאפה אשר למלך מצרים אשר
אסורים בבית הסהר: ויבא אליהם יוסף
בבקר וירא אתם והנם זעפים: וישאל
את-סריסי פרעה אשר אתו במשמר
בית אדניו לאמר מדוע פניכם רעים
היום: ויאמרו אליו חלום חלמנו ופתר
אין אתו ויאמר אליהם יוסף הלוא

tion; they were significant and not mere fantasies.

The dreams were so indicative of their true meaning that they hardly seemed to be dreams at all. They were so clear that they seemed to lack only a minor point to make their meaning so apparent that an interpreter would be unnecessary (R' Hirsch).

According to Rashi's Midrashic interpretation cited above: Each dreamed of the interpretation of the other's dream: The cupbearer saw an image of the baker being hanged, while the baker saw the cup-bearer being restored to his former position. Cf. also *Targum Yonasan*.

Minchah Belulah understands the Midrash to intimate that each envisioned one man promoted to honor and one hung but they did not know which was which.

המשקה והאפה אשר למלך מצרים — *The Cupbearer and the Baker of [lit. that were to] the king of Egypt.*

— This is repeated because their duties to the king were central in the theme of their respective dreams (Rashi).

They are designated without their title שר, *chamberlain*, to intimate that each dreamt of himself as nothing more than a *cupbearer* or a *baker*, not as men of great rank in charge of underlings. Being in-

carcerated, their spirits were broken and they gave no thought to lordship (*Sforno*).

In the contextual flow of the verse, the following phrases modify the earlier subject שניהם, *the two of them*. For clarity of interpretation of the verse should be perceived as if the phrases were transposed to read: *The two of them — the cupbearer and baker of the king of Egypt who were confined in the prison — dreamt a dream; each one had his dream on the same night, each one according to the interpretation of his dream*. There are many similar verses which require transposition of the stiches for better comprehension (Ramban to 37:2).

6. [And] — ויבא אליהם יוסף בבקר *Joseph came to them in the morning.*

To attend to their needs as was his practice (*Abarbanel*).^[1]

[And] he saw them — וירא אתם והנם זעפים *agrieved.*

The translation *aggrieved* follows Rashi. Comp. this meaning of the verb זעף, in *1 Kings 20:23* and *Micah 7:9*. Radak interprets similarly.

Ibn Ezra interprets the verb as נטרעש, *agitated, distraught*, citing this meaning in *Jonah 1:15*: *The sea stopped מנעו, its raging; agitation.*

1. Where did he come from? — Possibly he slept in the lower dungeon while they, as illustrious officials, stayed in the more spacious משקור, *ward*, mentioned often in this narrative. According to the *Midrash*, Joseph would go every day to attend to Potiphar's household needs [the house was attached to the prison; perhaps Potiphar wanted Joseph's Divine blessing to continue resting on the house] and he now came to serve these two prisoners as was his daily responsibility (*Oznaim l'Torah*).

the baker of the king of Egypt who were confined in the prison.

⁶ Joseph came to them in the morning. He saw them — Behold! they were aggrieved. ⁷ And he asked Pharaoh's courtiers who were with him in the ward of his master's house, saying, 'Why do you appear downcast today?' ⁸ And they said to him, 'We dreamt a dream, but there is no interpreter for it.' So Joseph

R' Hirsch renders: And behold they were overcast. He explains that *וַיֵּרָא* is related to *וַיִּצַח* and hence *וַיִּצַח*, veil — an external covering of the face. Similarly *וַיִּפְּחַ* refers to a veiling of the countenance from within a perplexed face — shielding one's ordinary expression of liveliness with an appearance of a troubled face.

7. וַיִּשְׂאֵל אֶת חֲרִישֵׁי פֶרַע אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ — And he asked Pharaoh's courtiers who were with him in the ward of his master's house.

The passage could simply have read 'And he asked them' without this circumlocution! Scripture's purpose in detailing this at length was to demonstrate that Joseph had serene confidence in himself. Though they regarded him as a despised, foreign slave and lowly prisoner, he nevertheless questioned these important courtiers of Pharaoh, offering to interpret their dreams at great personal risk, though he knew full well that if he were wrong and the baker were restored to his former position by Pharaoh, the baker would have hanged Joseph for his false interpretation (Ramban).

Sforno offers that it was only because Joseph had been appointed to minister to their personal needs that he had the temerity to question them. Otherwise it would have been presumptuous on his part.

Haamek Davar suggests that Joseph was unafraid of them because, as the verse tells us, they were with him, his fellow prisoners in the ward of his master's house.

מִדּוּעַ פְּנֵיהֶם רָעִים הַיּוֹם — Why do you appear downcast today? [lit. why are your faces bad today?]

— Joseph recognized that the presence of Pharaoh's two officers in prison with him was Providential and had meaning regarding his own future destiny. Their sad and worried appearance, therefore, made him personally interested in their plight (R' Munk).

8. חֲלוֹם הִלֵּמְנוּ וּפֶתֶר אֵין אִתּוֹ — We [i.e. each of us (Abarbanel)] dreamt a dream, but there is no interpreter for it.

I.e., there is no one who can explain the prophetic portentions of the dream. Apparently they had sent for interpreters, or perhaps there were people with them in prison, but none could interpret it. Or the implication of their remark could be: 'No one in the world could, in our opinion, interpret these dreams, so difficult are they' (Ramban).

According to Or HaChaim, the sense is that there was absolutely no one who could offer any interpretation whatsoever. This was different from the case of Pharaoh where the implication is that interpretations were offered, but none which would satisfy Pharaoh [see 41:8].

Haamek Davar [contrary to Ramban

וַיֹּשֶׁבֶט לְאֱלֹהִים פְּתָרִים סְפָרֵינָא לִי: וַיִּסְפֹּר
 שֶׁר־הַמִּשְׁקִים אֶת־חֻלְמוֹ לְיוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר
 , לוֹ בְּחֻלּוֹמִי וְהִנֵּה־גִפֶּן לִפְנֵי: וּבְגִפֶּן
 שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׁרִיגִם וְהוּא כְּפָרַחַת עָלֶתָה נִצָּה

וישב
מ/ט-י

above] maintains that the implication is that *here in jail there is no one to interpret it*, since no one is allowed in [presumably, had they been free they would have consulted one of the professional interpreters or soothsayers common in ancient Egypt who *could* have offered an acceptable interpretation].

— הָלוֹא לְאֱלֹהִים פְּתָרִים סְפָרֵינָא לִי
Do not interpretations belong to God? [or: Behold! (הִנֵּה) being understood as synonymous with הִנֵּה] Interpretations belong to God (alone)! (Ramban).] Relate [it] to me, if you please.

— Just as God sends the dream, so He grants man the wisdom to interpret it; otherwise, the dream would have been in vain. Therefore *tell it to me* — perhaps God will endow me with the wisdom to interpret it (*Radak*).

— The portentous interpretations of dreams belong only to God since He knows the future and it is He Who sends dreams to foreshadow events to whomever He wishes. Therefore you may tell it to me without fear — if my interpretation is untrue it will have no effect whatsoever since the meaning and fulfillment of dreams belong exclusively to God' (*Ibn Ezra*; see *Akeidas Yitzchak*; cf. *comm.* to v. 16 and *Or HaChaim* cited in v. 18).

Ramban cites *Ibn Ezra* and adds that Joseph intimated this so they should not punish him should evil befall them as a result of his prognostication.

According to *Ramban's* own opinion [which is similar to *Radak's*], the interpretation is: 'Do not the interpretations of all obscure dreams belong to God? He reveals it to whomever He

wishes. Now, please relate your mysterious dream to me; perhaps He will reveal its interpretation to me.'

Sforno: Man has wisdom to interpret dreams only because he was formed in the image of God; therefore I too, though now only a slave in prison, may possess this wisdom. Accordingly, you might not have been correct in saying that there is no one to interpret it.

— If dreams have meaning, then God must have caused them and arranged for them to be understood. He can convey understanding through anyone (*R' Hirsch*).

It is not the magician's art that will explain the dream. Dreams are revelation, so one has to be Divinely inspired to comprehend their significance (*Zohar*).

לִי — סְפָרֵינָא — *Relate it to me, if you please.*

I.e., in detail. See difference between the Hebrew terms סֵפֶר and דָּגֵר in *comm.* to 37:9-10.

The translation of כֵּן as *please* follows *Rashi's* interpretation of this word throughout Scripture [see for example 38:25 and v. 14 below]. *Onkelos* — except for a few isolated instances — regularly renders the word as כֵּן, *now*.

Or HaChaim in this instance also interprets it as *now*, rendering: *relate it to me now*. There two reasons for this. He explains that an interpretation of a dream is valid only if offered on the very next day; not later. Therefore Joseph insisted on being told the dream immediately, before it was too late. Secondly, according to the view that dreams follow the interpretation given them, Joseph was apprehensive that the chamberlains might seek another's interpretation first, and the other's might

40 said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God?
9-10 Relate it to me, if you please.'

'Then the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers recounted his dream to Joseph and said to him, 'In my dream — Behold! there was a grapevine in front of me! ¹⁰ On the grapevine were three tendrils. And it was as though it budded — its blossoms

materialize before his. Although the Talmud records an incident where twenty-four interpretations were given to a dream and they all materialized, *Or HaChaim* insists that this is so only where the interpretations do not oppose one another; otherwise, only the first one has veracity, and Joseph did not wish to forfeit the opportunity.

9. בְּחִלּוּמִי הִנֵּה גֶפֶן לִפְנֵי — *In my dream* [i.e., I saw in my dream (*Radak*)] — Behold! there was a grapevine in front of me.

The term *behold*, הִנֵּה, in the context of dreams, denotes that it was not merely a fantasy. The term [which has the colloquial sense of *look!*; *see!*] is used only to introduce something clearly of substance (*Akeidas Yitzhak*; see *comm.* to 28:13 p. 1228; 31:10; 37:7).

According to *Ramban*, the term in this context denotes comparison: 'In my dream it was as if there was a grape vine in front of me.'

Ibn Ezra in v. 15 mentions that all physical objects in dreams are comparisons rather than realities since all dreams are visual representations and not physically tangible.

10. וּבָנִים שְׁלֹשָׁה שְׂרִיגִים — [And] on the grapevine were three tendrils.

— Long branches known in Old French as *vitis* (*Rashi*).

There are usually many more than three tendrils on a vine. Joseph

accordingly perceived a special significance in this number (*Daas Soferim*). [See *comm.* to v. 12].

וְהָיָה כְּפִרְחָהּ עֲלֶיהָ גֶפֶן — And it was as though it budded — its blossoms bloomed; [lit. and it, as budding its blossom arose].

[The translation follows *Rashi* who interprets that the prefix כ is the כ of comparison as though]:

— It appeared to me in my dream as though it budded, and after the bud its blossom sprang up, i.e. it began to flower. The גֶּפֶן [blossom], is a later stage of development than פֶּרֶךְ [bud] as is evident from *Isaiah* 18:5; *Numbers* 17:23 (*Rashi*).

[*Rashi* makes an additional observation that *Onkelos'* rendering: וְהָיָה כְּפִרְחָהּ, and it, when it budded, brought forth blossoms is his translation only of the word פֶּרֶךְ. *Ramban* differs with this opinion maintaining that פֶּרֶךְ is *Onkelos'* Aramaic equivalent of the term גֶּפֶן. See *Ramban* and *R' Chavel's* notes for a full understanding of their respective opinions regarding which Aramaic words correspond to the Hebrew.]

According to *Ramban*, the prefix כ is temporal: as; when, and denotes immediacy. At the very moment that it budded its blossoms shot up and its clusters ripened into grapes. From this rapid development of the three tendrils, Joseph deduced that the dream would be fulfilled in three days rather than three months or years. [This differs with the view of *Ibn Ezra* below in v. 12]. The usage of כ to denote im-

יא הַבְּשִׁילוּ אֶשְׁכֶּלְתִּיהָ עֲנָבִים: וְכֹס פָּרְעָה
בְּיָדִי וְאָקַח אֶת־הָעֲנָבִים וְאֶשְׁחַט אֹתָם
אֶל־כֹּס פָּרְעָה וְאָתֵן אֶת־הַכֹּס עַל־כַּף
יב פָּרְעָה: וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יוֹסֵף זֶה פִּתְרוֹן שְׁלֹשֶׁת
יג הַשָּׂרְגִים שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים הֵם: בְּעוֹר |
שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים יִשָּׂא פָּרְעָה אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ

mediacy occurs often. Cf. 12:14, בְּמִשְׁכֵּב יָד, and 38:2, כָּבוֹא אֶבְרָהָם.

הַבְּשִׁילוּ אֶשְׁכֶּלְתִּיהָ עֲנָבִים — And its clusters ripened [into] grapes.

All in rapid succession following its blossoming (Ramban).

11. פָּרְעָה בְּיָדִי — [And] Pharaoh's cup was in my hand.

[There is an opinion in Yerushalmi Pesachim 10:1 that four cups are drunk at the Seder on Passover evening in allusion to the four times the word 'cup' is mentioned in these verses.]

יב — [And I] pressed them [i.e. the grapes] into [following Radak; lit. to] Pharaoh's cup.

The verb שָׁחַט appears nowhere else in Scripture. The translation pressed follows Rashi who cites Onkelos: וַעֲצָרִית, and relates it to the Mishnaic term סָחַט, press.

יג — And I placed [lit. gave] the cup on Pharaoh's palm.

— Pharaoh stretched out his hand to receive the cup from me (R' Hirsch).

12. The interpretation.

יג — This is its interpretation.

I.e., this is the interpretation of the details; the general significance of the dream is obvious (Haamek Davar).

'You have given me good tidings,' said Joseph to him [for, as noted in the footnote below, Joseph perceived the dream as alluding to the future Redemption]; 'therefore I too give you good tidings' (Midrash).

Ibn Ezra remarks that the term פִּתְרוֹן, interpretation, occurs only in connection with dreams.

יג — The three tendrils are three days.

I.e., they are meant to signify to you three days. There are many Midrashic interpretations of these words [cf. Chullin 92a] (Rashi).⁽¹⁾

According to Ibn Ezra, Joseph

1. The vine is Kabbalistically perceived as the symbol of Israel [see Hoshea 10:1]. The Zohar observes how Joseph was convinced that his Providential meeting with these chamberlains of the royal court was related to the destiny of the Abrahamitic line. He was overjoyed at hearing the Egyptian describe the miraculous fruition of the vine — its symbolic three tendrils budding, blossoming, and bringing forth succulent grapes in rapid succession. Beneath the immediate significance of the dream as it affected the cupbearer, Joseph connected it with the future flowering of his people. As the Midrash notes, when Joseph heard the prognostications of the dream, he said, 'You have given me good tidings, I too, will give you good tidings.'

With this introduction, we begin to appreciate the dream's deeper symbolism as perceived by the Sages in Chullin 92a. Among these interpretations [the full understanding of which eludes our grasp] are:

— The three branches represent the three men of excellence who arrive in every generation ... or the three celestial princes of the heathen nations who plead on behalf of Israel in every generation;

40 bloomed and its clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ And
11-13 Pharaoh's cup was in my hand and I took the grapes,
 pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I placed the
 cup on Pharaoh's palm.

¹² Joseph said to him, 'This is its interpretation:
 The three tendrils are three days. ¹³ In another three
 days Pharaoh will lift up your head and will restore

knew that the three branches represented three days rather than months or years, since he knew that Pharaoh's birthday would be in three days' time – a day when Pharaoh would make a great feast and summon all his courtiers.

Radak, Ramban [see above v. 10 s.v. *הוא פרחת*] and Ralbag maintain that Joseph knew from the rapid budding, blossoming, and maturing of the grapes in the dream that the dream would be fulfilled soon; hence he chose the shortest duration of time and interpreted the allusion of the tendrils as three days rather than months or years.

Abarbanel emphasizes however, that such speculation is academic. Joseph successfully interpreted the dream because of the agency of the Divine inspiration which provided him with the correct interpretation; not because he arrived at this interpretation by his own wisdom.

HaKsav V'HaKabbalah makes the grammatical observation that both the cupbearer and baker used the Hebrew term *שליש* [v. 10, 16] while Joseph, in both his interpreta-

tions employed the term *שליש*. The nuance suggests the difference between the speakers. The dreamers perceived three tendrils or baskets *individually* as unrelated units, a concept implied by the term *שליש*. Joseph, on the other hand, understood them as a set of three, therefore, he uses the term *שליש*, suggesting a group of three.

13. *בעוד שלשת ימים ישא פרעה את ראשוך* – In another three days Pharaoh will lift up your head.

I.e., he will take account of you. The idiom *lift up the head* means to count [cf. *Exod.* 30:12]. The sense here is that when Pharaoh will assemble his other servants to wait upon him during the meal he will count you among them (Rashi).

[Compare the use of this expression in verses 19 and 20 below.]

R' Hirsch [to v. 20] explains that the counting of people is expressed by this idiom probably because a large number of people crowded together look like a solid compact mass which cannot be counted; only their protruding heads can be counted.

Ibn Ezra agrees with Rashi's interpretation citing v. 20 where the chamberlains were counted among Pharaoh's servants. He also cites a

– The vine = the world; the three branches = the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the budding blossoms = the Matriarchs; the clusters bringing forth grapes = the tribes;

– The vine = the Torah; the three branches = Moses, Aaron, and Miriam; the budding blossoms = the members of the Sanhedrin; the clusters bringing forth grapes = the righteous people of every generation.

One Talmudic Sage interprets the passage as referring to Jerusalem:

– The vine = Jerusalem; the three branches = the Temple, the king, and the High Priest; the budding blossoms = the budding young priests; the clusters bringing forth grapes = the drink-offerings;

Another opinion is that it symbolized God's gifts to Israel:

– The vine = the Torah; the three branches = the well [see *Numb.* 21:16-20], the pillar of smoke [*Exod.* 40:36], and the Manna [*ibid.* 16:4]; the budding blossoms = [the fertile land

והשיבך על-כנך ונתת כוס-פרעה בידו
 כמשפט הראשון אשר היית משקהו: כי
 אם-זכרתני אתך כאשר ייטב לך
 ועשית-נא עמדי חסד והזכרתני אל-
 פרעה והוצאתני מן-הבית הזה: כי-גנב

figurative interpretation, shared by Radak, that his head would be lifted up from its present lowly status.

According to Abarbanel, the verb יָשָׁא denotes forgiveness [comp. 32:21 יָשָׁא יְקִי, forgive me.]. Accordingly, the expression here denotes: Pharaoh will forgive you.

והשיבך על-כנך – And [he] will restore you to your post.

The translation of כֵּנֶךָ as your post; place, follows Rashi.

Ibn Ezra relates it to the words כֵּבֹן, base [see Rashi to Zechariah 5:11]; מְתֻכָּנִים, former condition [see II Chron. 24:13]. He suggests that it is possibly related to כֵּן [root] cf. Numb. 27:7 בְּנוֹת זֶלַפְחָד וְדָבָרן, the daughters of Zelaphchad speak correctly, i.e. with basis (Yohel Or); comp. Daniel 11:20 וְקָמָה עַל כִּנּוּ, shall stand on his place.

ונתת כוס-פרעה בידו – And you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand.

Pharaoh's former trust in you will be fully restored; he will unquestioningly take his cup directly from your hand without demanding that you taste it first (Meshech Chochmah).

14. Joseph asks the cupbearer to intercede on his behalf.

which produced abundant] First Fruits [ibid. 23:16]; the clusters bringing forth grapes=the drink offerings.

— The vine=Israel (see Psalms 80:9); the three branches=the Three Festivals, Pesach, Shavuot, Succot; the budding=the abundant fertility of Israel (Exod. 1:7); its blossoms bloomed=its time for Redemption is at hand; the clusters bringing forth grapes=the time has come for Egypt to drink the cup of staggering [i.e. of disaster; see Jeremiah 46:2, 13].

R' Shimon ben Lakish said, The people of Israel is like a vine: Its branches are the aristocracy, its clusters the scholars, its leaves the common people, its twigs those in Israel who are void of learning. This was the intent of the message once sent from Eretz Yisrael to the community in Babylon: 'Let the clusters pray for the leaves, for were it not for the leaves the clusters could not exist' [i.e., every class is essential to the well-being of the community] (Chullin 92a).

— כי אם-זכרתני אתך כאשר ייטב לך only [lit. for if] you would think of me with yourself when he [i.e., Pharaoh] benefits you.

The contextual flow is: You will be restored to your former post (and achieve such influence) ... that if you would keep me in mind along with yourself after it will go well with you as I predicted in my interpretation, and you will do me a personal kindness, and mention me to Pharaoh – then you would [thereby] get me out of this place. (Rashi as explained by Mizrahi).

I.e., your rise to prominence, in accordance with my interpretation will be so profound, that you will merely need mention me to Pharaoh in order to free me from prison, for he will certainly listen to you (Rashbam).

This interpretation bases itself on the phrase כי אם being the idiomatic equivalent of אשר אם, that if; cf. Rashi to 24:33 עַד אשר is equivalent to עַד אשר. Furthermore, the hoped-for consequence, according to Mizrahi, commences at והוצאתני, then you will thereby get me out.

According to Ramban the contextual flow is: 'If you plan to remember me

you to your post, and you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as was the former practise when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ If only you would think of me with yourself when he benefits you, and you will do me a kindness, if you please, and mention me to Pharaoh, then you would get me out of this building. ¹⁵ For in-

when things go well for you, then I now [אָ] ask you to do me the favor of making mention of me to Pharaoh in order to secure my release. Or, if [as Rashi maintains] אָ denotes *supplication*, then the syntax is: 'If you plan to remember me and would like to do me a kindness, then mention me to Pharaoh, etc.'

Chizkuni renders: 'If only you would keep me in mind, you would be doing me a great service since you would secure my release from this house.'

It is only reasonable to assume that you will bear me in mind to do me a kindness inasmuch as through my interpretation you realized some joy and I gladdened you in your misery. It is proper that you deal kindly with me when my interpretation will materialize (Radak).

Joseph asked the cupbearer two favors: That he himself remember him; and that he recall him to Pharaoh. This accounts for the dual phraseology of v. 23: *The Chamberlain of the Cupbearers did not remember Joseph; and he forgot him* — i.e. he forgot to mention him to Pharaoh (*Daas Zekainim*; R' Bachya).

The force of the word אָתָּךְ, *along with you*, is either: remember to show me mercy in the same way that it will be shown you when you will have been released from prison; or: think of me as if I were with you (Ramban).

וְעָשִׂיתָ לִּי חֲסֶד וְרַחֲמִים — *And you will do me a kindness, if you please.*

אָ always denotes a personal supplication (Rashi).

According to one interpretation in Ramban, above, it could also mean *now*.

וְהִזְכַּרְתִּי אֶל-פַּרְעֹה — *And mention [lit. recall] me to Pharaoh.*

I.e., intercede on my behalf with Pharaoh. He will weigh your words heavily inasmuch as you are an important official (Radak).

Praise me by saying that in the house of the Chamberlain of the Butchers there is a servant worthy of serving kings. Or: once you are returned to your former exalted position, do me the favor of praising me as the lad who served you well in prison and ask that Pharaoh release me from prison to become your personal servant. Or the sense might be: Pharaoh already knows me from my excellent service in Potiphar's house. All you need do is mention my name to him and protest my innocence; that will be enough to secure my release from here (Ramban; Tur; Sforzo).

וְהוֹצֵאתִי מִן-הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה — *Then [lit. and] you would [thereby] get me out of this building [lit. house].*

I.e., secure my freedom. Not only from this prison, but from this entire house where I am enslaved (Haamek Davar).

That the desired outcome of Joseph's request commences with this phrase [if you do all the above then you would thereby be getting me out of this house] follows Mizrahi's interpretation of Rashi.

According to the various interpretations offered by Ramban, the desired outcome commenced either with חֲסֶד וְרַחֲמִים, *then do me now a kindness, and mention me, etc.*, or הִזְכַּרְתִּי אֶל-פַּרְעֹה, *then mention me to Pharaoh.*

As mentioned in the *comm.* to 39:20, because Joseph placed his trust in the Chamberlain of the

וַיִּשָּׁב מִטּוֹ טו עֲשִׂיתִי מְאוֹמָה כִּי־שָׁמוּ אֹתִי בְּבֹרֶ: וַיֵּרָא
גִּנְבֹתִי מֵאֶרֶץ הָעִבְרִים וְגַם־פֹּה לֹא־ שֶׁר־הָאֲפִים כִּי טוֹב פֶּתַר וַיֵּאמֶר אֶל־

Cupbearers instead of in God Himself, he was punished by having his prison sentence — which would otherwise have totaled ten years: one for each of the ten brothers about whom he had brought evil reports — increase by an additional two years (*Seder Olam*; *Tanchuma*; *Shmos Rabbah* 7:1. [Cited by Rashi in v. 23 below.]¹¹)

15. 'Do not think you would be committing an injustice by praising me and being instrumental in securing my release from jail, for I am not a slave by birth. I am really innocent and should not have been here in

the first place!' (*Rashbam*; *Ramban*).

כי גנב גנבתי מארץ העברים — For indeed I was kidnaped [idiomatic; literally the Hebrew is in the infinitive compound for emphasis: *steal I was stolen*] from the land of the Hebrews.¹²)

Land of the Hebrews [*Ivrim*] is a reference to the territory of Hebron where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob dwelt. Abraham — the illustrious patriarch of the family in whom the blessing of *I will make your name great* [12:1] was exemplified — was called the *Ivri* [above 14:13] since he came מעבר, from [ever] 'across',

1. R' *Bachya* comments that we dare not think that a *tzaddik* of Joseph's stature would place his trust in a human being rather than in God. That Joseph asked for the chamberlain's assistance was only because he assumed that Providence had placed the deposed courtier in prison so that he would become the vehicle to bring about the miracle. Joseph knew that God customarily assists the righteous through seemingly natural means. In this, he was right, but it was sinful for so great a man to seek natural means of salvation; he should have allowed God to work His way as He saw fit.

Most of our Sages find nothing reprehensible in an ordinary person resorting to the intervention of a human being, with the idea that he may serve as an instrument of Divine Providence. But "God is exacting to a hairsbreadth with those closest to Him" (*Yevamos* 121b) — and Joseph was surely among the closest. Throughout his long series of misfortunes, Joseph's confidence in God was absolute; never did he utter a word of recrimination, complaint, or self-justification. Then, suddenly, he meets Pharaoh's deposed chamberlain and his faith in God wavers ever so slightly! For a man of Joseph's stature, this is a major shortcoming (*R' Munk*). [See *Bais HaLevi* and the *Overview* to *Mikeitz*.]

'Had the cupbearer mentioned Joseph to Pharaoh', *Midrash HaGadol* [to 41:1] asks, 'what could Joseph have done when he was freed — open a shop for the interpretation of dreams? Therefore Providence caused him to be incarcerated another two years until Pharaoh would dream and he could achieve greatness.'

[However, even these additional two years of imprisonment imposed upon him was a manifestation of God's grace. The commentators perceive that Joseph's excessively long stay in prison was a way of preparing him for the workings of government and the monarchy. For he was, as 39:20 records, incarcerated together with political prisoners, and he learned from them about politics and the power interplay of the royal palace.]

2. The *Midrash* [*Devarim Rabbah* 2:5] records that God refused Moses' request to be buried in *Eretz Yisrael*, saying: 'One who acknowledged it as his land is buried in his land, one who did not acknowledge it as his land is not buried there.'

Joseph was described contemptuously by Potiphar's wife as עברי, a *Hebrew man* (39:14), yet he did not deny the fact; even in prison he proclaimed himself to be a native of the *land of the Hebrews*. Therefore he earned the right to be buried in *Eretz Yisrael*. But Moses heard himself described by Jethro's daughters as an *Egyptian man* (*Exodus* 2:19), and he ac-

40 deed I was kidnaped from the land of the Hebrews,
16 and even here I have done nothing for them to have put me in the pit.'

¹⁶ The Chamberlain of the Bakers saw that he had interpreted well. He said to Joseph, 'I, too! In my

the River Euphrates. His offspring assumed the distinguishing name *Ivri* [=Hebrew] in order not to intermingle with the various Canaanite people, and this name has remained Israel's name ever since. When Joseph came to Potiphar's house he apparently told them he was a Hebrew [39:14]. The territory around Hebron, where they resided, was referred to as the land of the *Ivrim*, not because the Canaanites acknowledged it as theirs, but because of the prominence achieved by the descendants of Abraham, who was acknowledged by the inhabitants as a prince of God [23:6] (Ramban).

The Midrash finds in the dual expression *steal I was stolen* an allusion to the several times Joseph's captors changed hands when he had been sold [see *comm.* to 37:35].

וְגַם-כֹּה לֹא-עָשִׂיתִי מֵאִמָּהּ כִּי-שָׂמוּ אֹתִי
- כְּבוֹר - And even here I have done nothing for them to have put me in the pit.

I am confident, therefore, that Pharaoh would be disposed to heed your recommendation and release

me (Sforno).

[It is noteworthy that this is the very first time throughout all Joseph's trials that he breaks his silence and protests his innocence.]

[Possibly Joseph's use of the word *בור*, *pit*, subtly alluded to the pit into which his brothers had thrown him into before they sold him (37:24), the intimation being: I was innocent then just as I was here in Egypt. I did nothing to deserve being thrown into the pit in either of the cases.]

16. The baker's dream.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הַכֹּהֵן הַמֶּלֶךְ - [And] the Chamberlain of the Bakers saw that he [=Joseph] had interpreted well [lit. good].

— Accounting for every detail (Haamek Davar).

The word טוב *good* can be interpreted as an adverb: *well, accurately*, or as an adjective: *favorably, good*.

I.e., that he had interpreted it accurately, as Onkelos renders. The sense of the passage is that the Chamberlain of the Bakers had no confidence in Joseph and did not intend to tell him his dream. [He

quiesced silently and did not identify himself as a Hebrew. Therefore, he did not merit burial in Eretz Yisrael.

The question is raised, however, that Joseph was truly a native of the land of the Hebrews, while Moses had never even seen Eretz Yisrael. Why should Moses be expected to describe himself as other than an Egyptian?

— The unfavorable Midrashic comparison of Moses with Joseph teaches that from the time when Eretz Yisrael was promised to Abraham, a Jew is duty-bound to consider himself a native of the Holy Land, no matter what his origin (R' Meir Yechiel of Ostrovitz).

— Furthermore, Moses came to Jethro as the hero who had saved his daughters; he had no reason not to declare proudly 'I am a Jew!' But Joseph was a slave imprisoned for a shameful crime, and instead of currying the favor of the powerful by denying that he was a Hebrew, he was proud of his origin and awaited the day when his innocence would be acknowledged and lend credit to his native land (R' Munk).

וַיֹּסֶף אֶף-אֲנִי בְחֻלּוֹמֵי וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה סִלִּי וַיֹּשֶׁב
 חָרִי עַל-רָאשֵׁי: וּבִסֵּל הָעֲלִיוֹן מִכָּל מ/י-יח
 מֵאֲכָל פֶּרֶעָה מַעֲשֶׂה אִפֶּה וְהַעוֹף אֲכָל
 אֶתְּם מִן-הַסֵּל מֵעַל רָאשֵׁי: וַיַּעַן יוֹסֵף יח

viewed Joseph as a mere slave – certainly not vested with the art of interpreting dreams (*Abarbanel*).] But when he saw that Joseph had interpreted his comrade's dream in a fair and proper manner, he changed his mind and told Joseph his dream as well. Or, the sense of the passage is that when he saw that Joseph gave a *favorable* interpretation to his comrade's dream he rejoiced and proceeded to relate his own dream also, expecting a cheerful report (*Ramban*).

– He hoped that Joseph would give him a similar favorable interpretation of his dream, because as the Sages declared, the fulfillment of a dream depends on how it is interpreted; similarly, verse 22 states that the fate of the chamberlains was just as Joseph had interpreted to them (*Sforino*; see *Ibn Ezra* to v. 8 above).

The Talmud asks: How did the baker know that Joseph had interpreted the dream well [i.e., accurately]? – This teaches that each of them dreamt his own dream and the interpretation of his companion's dream [see *comm.* to v. 5] (*Berachos* 55b).

– And when he perceived that Joseph's interpretation coincided with the interpretation as he had dreamt it [but which he did not comprehend until Joseph gave it meaning] he realized that Joseph was right (*Or HaChaim*).¹¹

According to *Rashbam*, he knew the interpretation was correct because 'the truth speaks for itself.' [Although the baker had no objective proof that Joseph was right, he was convinced of it for the very reason that it *was* the truth. The expression 'the truth speaks for itself' (וַיִּכְרֶץ דְּבַר אֱמֶת) is taken from *Sotah* 9b where in interpreting *Judges* 16:18 Rava explains that the perfidious Delilah could tell when Samson had opened his heart to her completely since 'the truth speaks for itself'. Such is the power of truth.

וַיֹּסֶף אֶף-אֲנִי בְחֻלּוֹמֵי – *I, too! In my dream—*

I.e., I too had a dream. In it I perceived the following (*Ralbag*).

R' Hirsch renders: *I, too, was in my dream* – I too had a dream in which I was the main character.

The Hebrew word חָרִי, here translated in the contextual, literal, sense of *too*, also has the meaning of *anger*. The Sages in the *Midrash* observe that a description of his dream with this inauspicious word augured evil for the baker. This is similar to the fate of three others in Scripture "who commenced with חָרִי and subsequently perished with חָרִי, *anger*: The serpent [*Genesis* 3:1]; the assembly of Korach [*Numbers* 16:14]; Haman [*Esther* 5:12]."

וְהִנֵּה – *Behold!*

I.e., in my dream I envisioned, in a concrete, non-fantastic vision, what appeared to be ... (see *Ibn Ezra* and *Ramban* to v. 9).

1. When God uses dreams as a vehicle to reveal His plans, the structure of the message must be such that upon hearing the interpretation the dreamer should exclaim, 'Of course! – it is so obvious I should have thought of it myself!' Once Joseph had added the new insight that the three tendrils represented three days, the dream seemed almost self-explanatory so the cupbearer could correctly say, 'he has interpreted well.' When God conveys a message through a vision, the explanation must flow naturally from the vision once the key to its interpretation has been provided (*R' Hirsch*).

dream — Behold! three wicker baskets were on my head. 17 And in the uppermost basket were all kinds of Pharaoh's food — baker's handiwork — and the birds were eating them from the basket above my head.'

שְׁלֹשָׁה סָלֵי חֹרִי עֲלֵי־רֹאשִׁי — Three wicker [lit. open-work] baskets [were] on my head.

The translation *wicker baskets* follows *Rashi* who derives the word חֹרִי from חֹר, *hole*. He explains that the reference is to 'baskets made of peeled willow, made so that they have many holes' i.e., the plaited wicker baskets commonly used in *Rashi's* time by merchants of fancy rolls to hold their goods.

Ramban, following *R' Saadiah Gaon* [cited by *Ibn Ezra*] interprets חֹר as *white* (cf. *Isaiah* 29:22 and the Aramaic חויר, *white*, and *Mishnah Beitza* 2:6 חוירי, *white cakes*. Cf. also *Yerushalmi* *ibid.* where it is derived from our passage that the term חויר refers to extra fine, large loaves of white bread). *Ramban* accordingly interprets our phrase as *baskets of white bread*, 'the kind of bread that befits a king'. He maintains that this is the correct interpretation inasmuch as the baskets in the dream contained the king's bread and in the uppermost basket there were all manner of baked goods for Pharaoh.

Ralbag renders: *White baskets*.

The three baskets are Midrashically perceived to foreshadow the later Powers who would subjugate Israel in its exiles.

17. וּבָסֵל הָעֵלִיּוֹן מִכָּל מַאֲכָל אֶפֶס — *And in the uppermost basket were [of] all kinds of Pharaoh's food — baker's handiwork.*

The sense is that all the food in

the baskets were fit for a Pharaoh (*R' Hirsch*) ...

The *Midrash* perceives this to prophetically symbolize the insatiable greed of Rome, the uppermost enemy of Israel who extorted tribute from all the nations of the earth.

וְהָעוֹף אָכַל אֹתָם מִן־הַסֵּל מֵעַל רֹאשִׁי — *And the birds were eating them [i.e. these baked goods] from the basket above my head.*

[The noun עוֹף, *bird*, is in the singular. In the Hebrew idiom, the singular form is used to designate an indefinite number of a particular species].

[Continuing *R' Hirsch* above]: ... Yet the baker saw birds, not Pharaoh, eating his goods. Not only did they eat Pharaoh's own food, they had the impudence to eat it right off the basket on the baker's head, and he was powerless to stop them! No bird would have the temerity to do that to a living person.

Birds generally symbolize Israel's enemies, Israel itself being metaphorically compared to bread. Thus the inner meaning of the birds eating the baked goods was perceived by Joseph to be a prognostication of the suffering inflicted on Israel by its preying enemies. Joseph was constantly aware of omens unfavorable to Israel's destiny. He perceived that these birds were symbolically swooping down to attack and scatter Israel [as in Abraham's vision 15:11] whenever Israel tried to shake off the yoke of Torah and refuse to uphold the crown of the Heavenly King placed on its forehead [as represented here by the baskets] (*Tanchuma; Zohar*; cf. *Or HaChaim*).

וישב מִי־טֹב יט וַיֹּאמֶר זֶה פִּתְרֹנִי שְׁלֹשֶׁת הַסִּלִּים שְׁלֹשֶׁת
 יָמִים הֵם: בְּעוֹד | שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים יִשָּׂא
 פָּרְעָה אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ מֵעַלֶּיךָ וְתָלָה אוֹתָךְ
 עַל־עֵץ וְאָכַל הָעוֹף אֶת־בָּשָׂרְךָ מֵעַלֶּיךָ:
 וַיֹּהִי כֹּ מִפְּטִיר בֹּ כֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יוֹם הַלְדַּת אֶת־
 פָּרְעָה וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתָּה לְכָל־עַבְדָּיו וַיִּשָּׂא

18. [And] Joseph responded and said.

Oz naim LaTorah notes that Joseph's response to the baker is prefaced by the word וַיַּעַן and he answered, while his reply to the cupbearer has no such introduction. This alludes to the rule that while one should avoid being the bearer of evil tidings, if one is questioned directly, he should not lie in order to avoid announcing the unpleasant news [Yoreh De'ah 402:12]. Therefore, Joseph did not hesitate in his interpretation of the cupbearers dream. Since its meaning was favorable, Joseph had no compunctions about expressing it, and he even initiated the interpretation. The baker's dream, however, presaged the baker's death. Therefore, Joseph did not offer to tell its meaning, but when the baker pressed him to do so — וַיַּעַן, he responded.

וְזֶה פִּתְרֹנוֹ — This is its interpretation.

I.e., the dream is its own interpretation. The general symbolism is obvious, only the details require interpretation [comp. v. 12] (Haamek Davar).

'You have brought me evil tidings,' Joseph told him [since as noted, Joseph perceived inauspicious symbolisms for Israel in the dream], 'I, too, bring you evil tidings regarding your fate ... (Midrash).

Joseph used these same words to introduce his interpretation of the cupbearer's dream [v. 12]. By stressing this is its interpretation, he asserted his authority, making clear that the dream would come true only according to his interpretation. This was in consonance with the Talmudic dictum that the fulfillment of a dream follows its interpretation [i.e., if one articulated a favorable interpretation, his words would force events to shape themselves favorably, even if they had been destined to take an evil turn (Alshich)]. With this principle in mind, Joseph made a similar declaration before interpreting Pharaoh's dream [see comm. to 41:16] (Or HaChaim).

Actually, both dreams could have lent themselves to the same interpretation since the bird eating the food from atop the baker's head could have been taken as symbolizing Pharaoh having a change of heart and restoring the baker to his post [see Ezekiel 17]. But Joseph was influenced by the histories of the dreamers — their status at the royal court and the difference between the crimes for which they had been sentenced, the one for forgivable carelessness and the other for gross negligence [see Rashi and Malbim to v. 1-2] (Akeidas Yitzchak).¹¹

Cf. Abarbanel cited to v. 12,

18-20 ¹⁸ Joseph responded and said, 'This is its interpretation: The three baskets are three days. ¹⁹ In three days Pharaoh will lift your head from you and hang you on a tree. Birds will eat your flesh from you.'

²⁰ And it was on the third day, Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants and he

however, who objects to such explanations and maintains that Divine inspiration guided Joseph in his interpretation, not his own wisdom alone.

שלוש הסלים שלש ימים הם — The three baskets are [i.e., represent] three days.

Haamek Davar maintains that Joseph perceived this short span from the closeness to one another of the three baskets in the dream. [But cf. *Abarbanel* above to v. 12] (*Haamek Davar*).

R' Bachya notes that the *gematria* [numerical equivalent] of שלש equals that of השלם ימים.

19. ישא פדעה את ראשך מעלך — Pharaoh will lift your head from [upon] you.

This term ישא ראש, lift off the head, is used here in the literal sense meaning: he will behead you. As a play on words, the same expression is used in the figurative sense of to count in verses 13 and 20.

20. Pharaoh's birthday feast. The fulfillment of the interpretation.

יום הולדת את-פרעה — Pharaoh's birthday [lit. the day Pharaoh was caused to be born].

— His birthday; the day referred to in the Talmud [*Avodah Zarah* 10a] as יום גינוקא, the birthday festival. The verb הולדת [lit. caused to be born] is in the causative *hifil* form [and takes the particle *אח* before the subject] because the birth of a child is assisted by others, such as the midwife helping the mother to give birth. Thus the midwife is called מולדת, one who causes to be born. Comp. *Ezekiel* 16:4; *Lev.* 13:55 (*Rashi*).

R' Bachya, following *Radak*, offers an alternative interpretation: It was the birthday of a new Pharaoh. On that day a son was born to Pharaoh. As crown prince, the baby was named Pharaoh because he would eventually ascend the throne. To celebrate the event, the king made a great feast.

ויעש משתה לכל-עבדיו — That [lit. and] he made a feast for all his servants.

The word משתה, from שתה, drink, refers throughout Scripture

1. It was necessary that there be different fates for the cupbearer and the baker. Had both the favorable dreams, they would have assumed that the Hebrew slave had fabricated favorable interpretations in order to flatter them for his own self-advancement. Joseph's veracity was established only by the fact that he put his life in mortal danger by predicting the baker's doom, for had Joseph been wrong, and had the baker been restored to his former power, he would certainly have had Joseph executed for the anguish caused by his terrifying interpretation.

Because this proved to the cupbearer that Joseph was Divinely inspired, he eventually praised him to Pharaoh (*Abarbanel*).

וּיֹשֵׁב כֹּהֵן מִבְּנֵי כֹהֵן
 אֶת־רֹאשׁ | שֶׁר הַמְּשָׁקִים וְאֶת־רֹאשׁ שֶׁר
 הָאֲפִים בְּתוֹךְ עֲבָדָיו: וַיֵּשֶׁב אֶת־שֶׁר
 הַמְּשָׁקִים עַל־מִשְׁקָהוּ וַיִּתֵּן הַכּוֹס עַל־כַּף
 פָּרְעֹה: וְאֶת שֶׁר הָאֲפִים תָּלָה בְּאֶשֶׁר
 פָּתַר לָהֶם יוֹסֵף: וְלֹא־זָכַר שֶׁר־הַמְּשָׁקִים
 אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁכַּח: כא
מ/כא-כג

to a wine feast (*Sforno*; cf. 19:3; 26:30; 21:8).

וַיֵּשֶׁב אֶת־רֹאשׁ ... בְּתוֹךְ עֲבָדָיו — *And he counted (see v. 13) the [head of the] Chamberlain of the Cupbearers and [the head of] the Chamberlain of the Bakers among his servants.*

The translation follows Rashi here and in v. 13. Pharaoh included them among the other servants whom he expected to serve him at his feast, and he took special notice of them (*Rashi*).

21. וַיֵּשֶׁב אֶת־שֶׁר הַמְּשָׁקִים עַל מִשְׁקָהוּ — [*And*] *He restored the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers to his cup-bearing [lit. to his beverage].*

— His offense was found to be less serious than that of the baker's, and therefore pardonable [see *Mizrachi* to v. 1 s.v. חֲטָאוּ].

22. וְאֶת־שֶׁר־הָאֲפִים תָּלָה — *But the Chamberlain of the Bakers he [Pharaoh] hanged.*

Because his offense displayed gross negligence of his duties towards the monarch [*ibid.*].

According to *Malbim* [see his *comm.* here and to verses 1 and 2], the reverse would have been true

justice since the baker had less *personal* responsibility in his offense than the cupbearer in his. Nevertheless, this was the fate of each — not because it was just — but, as the verse proceeds to inform us, *because this was how Joseph interpreted it to them.*

וַיִּפְתַּר לָהֶם יוֹסֵף — *Just as Joseph had interpreted to them.*

Each met the fate which Joseph had predicted (*Midrash*).

— This proved that the manner in which each dream was fulfilled was *due* to its interpretation (*Sforno*; *Yafeh Toar*).

Providence ordained their respective fates in order to prove Joseph's veracity and prepare the circumstances for his rise to greatness (*Abarbanel*; *Malbim*).

23. וְלֹא זָכַר שֶׁר הַמְּשָׁקִים אֶת יוֹסֵף — *But the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers did not remember Joseph, and he forgot him.*

The passage is apparently redundant and the commentators explain the nuances of the two similar phrases.

— *The Chamberlain of the Cupbearers did not remember Joseph on the day he was freed; and*

- 40 counted the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers and the
 21-23 Chamberlain of the Bakers among his servants. ²¹ He
 restored the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers to his
 cupbearing and he placed the cup on Pharaoh's palm.
²² But the Chamberlain of the Bakers he hung just as
 Joseph had interpreted to them.
²³ Yet the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers did not
 remember Joseph, and he forgot him.

he forgot him in the future
 (Rashi).⁽¹⁾

It was not that the cupbearer had
 no opportunity to recall Joseph —
 he deliberately forgot him, by put-
 ting him out of his mind (*Haamek
 Davar*).

Ibn Ezra interprets — He did not
 make mention of him to Pharaoh,
 and he forgot him in his heart.

The *Midrash* perceives another
 intent of this verse: True, the
 Chamberlain of the Cupbearers
 forgot Joseph, but the Holy One

Blessed be He did not, as the events
 in the next *Sidrah* will graphically
 portray.

According to the Masoretic note appearing
 at the end of the *Sidrah* there are 112 verses
 in *Vayeshev*, numerically corresponding to
 the mnemonic יבנק. The root of the word is
 בקק, emptying out. The allusion is that this
Sidrah contains the beginning of the process
 which was to culminate in Israel's first exile,
 the process by which Jacob and his family
 were emptied out of their native land and
 forced to spend 210 years in Egypt.

The *Haftorah* begins with *Amos* 2:6 ה' אָמַר

נשלם סדרה וישב בעזרת האל

1. Rashi continues that [the cupbearer's forgetting of Joseph was a Providentially inspired punishment.] Joseph placed his trust in the cupbearer, [rather than in God], depending on the cupbearer to remember him and secure his release. Joseph was therefore condemned to remain in prison for another two years. [See *Seder Olam* cited in v. 14.] There is a Midrashic tradition [*Shemos Rabbah* 7:1] that Joseph deserved to be imprisoned only ten years — one year for each of his ten brothers about whom he had brought evil reports [above 37:2] — but since he placed his trust in the human agencies of the cupbearer, imploring him twice to remember him — וְזָכַרְתִּי, remember me, and וְהִזְכַּרְתִּי, recall me, — he was punished with two more years in prison (*Tanchuma*). As we learn in 41:1, it was not for another two years that Joseph was to have the opportunity of being freed.

[Furthermore, as *R' Bachya* writes, since Joseph used the dual expression of remembering, the Torah uses corresponding dual terms to record how the cupbearer did not remember him and forgot him.]

Rashi concludes: Thus is it written [*Psalms* 40:5]: Praises to the man who made HASHEM his trust and turned not to the רִקְבִים, 'arrogant' — a reference to the Egyptians whom *Isaiah* (30:7) calls רִקְבָה, arrogant. [For explanations of Joseph's motive in so placing his trust, see footnote to v. 14 above, and the Overview to *Mikeitz*.]

סדר מקץ

§ Sidrah Mikeitz

— *The Overviews*

An Overview — Faith and Trust

„אשר־הִנָּכַר אֶשְׂרָשָׁם ה' מִבְּחָחוֹ" וְהַ יוֹסֵף
וְלֹא־פָנָה אֶל־רֵהֲבִים" ע"י שֶׁאָמַר לְשֶׁר
הַמְשָׁקִים „זְכַרְתִּי ... וְהִזְכַּרְתִּי" גִּיתוֹסֵף לוֹ שְׁתֵּי
שָׁנִים

'Praises to the man who made HASHEM His trust,' this refers to Joseph, 'and turned not to the arrogant' (Psalms 40:5) — because he said to the chamberlain of the cupbearers, 'Remember me ... and mention me [to Pharaoh]' (40:14), two years were added to his [term in prison] (Bereishis Rabbah 89:3).

Wavering Trust

These Midrashic descriptions of Joseph seem to be contradictory. The Midrash cites a verse that praises one who maintains his trust in HASHEM but without disapproves of the one who seeks the aid of the arrogant, yet both descriptions are applied to Joseph. He is described as the one of perfect trust while in the same breath he is dubbed the person who was punished with two years in prison for wrongly soliciting the aid of Pharaoh's cupbearer. If he epitomizes the one who trusts, then why did he 'turn to the arrogant,' and if he was so callous in his trust as to seek out the arrogant why is he praised as 'the man who made HASHEM his trust'?

Aside from the contradiction, the verse shocks us.

*Joseph was
severely punished
— two years in
prison! — for
doing nothing
more than any
normal human
being would
consider his
minimum
obligation.*

Its implication, especially as interpreted by the Midrash, is that no one is permitted to seek natural means to further his own ends. Joseph was severely punished — two years in prison! — for doing nothing more than any normal human being would consider his minimum obligation. He had already been jailed ten years for a crime he did not commit. Without family or friends he had languished in the Egyptian

dungeon for the best years of his young adulthood. Now for the first time he had the ear and a claim upon the assistance of a member of Pharaoh's inner circle. Should he not take the opportunity to get his message to those who could help him?

To a man of Joseph's stature, the strange phenomenon of the two dreams that enabled him to prove his unusual skill could be nothing less than a Divine intervention.

Even more, Joseph surely understood the presence in his jail of the two deposed officials and their subsequent dreams as a Heaven-sent means of effecting his release. To a man of Joseph's stature, the strange phenomenon of the two dreams that enabled him to prove his unusual skill could be nothing less than a Divine intervention. All he did in urging his innocence upon the cupbearer was to seek a means by which God's will could be carried out — what was his crime? How was he different from the farmer who plows, sows, and reaps? The Torah assures Israel *וּבִרְכָּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה*, and *HASHEM your God will bless you in all that you do* (Deut. 15:18), and *וְאַסַּפְתָּ דָגְגֶךָ*, *you are to gather in your grain* (Deut. 11:15). The implication is clear that one *may* — indeed, *should*, — work for a livelihood, and that God will bless him, not punish him, for doing so. As R' Yishmael taught in *Berachos* 35b, one should live a normal life of working for his sustenance at appropriate times and in appropriate ways. Surely Joseph had the right, if not the duty, to seek his freedom! (*Bais HaLevi*).

Similar but Different Every Jew has two commandments that seem identical but are different. He must have faith in God's existence and he must place his trust in Him. *Rambam* (*Sefer HaMitzvos*), lists Faith in God as the primary commandment, for it is a logical imperative that there can be no commandments unless there is a Being Who has the authority to command. In the temporal sense, legislation cannot be binding unless the law-making body represents a sovereign state or city that has the authority to make laws. An American is not bound by the laws of Great Britain unless he is on British territory. Similarly, organizational by-laws are binding only on members of that organization. The Torah's commandments are

Legislation cannot be binding unless the law-making body represents a sovereign state or city that has the authority to make laws.

binding because they are the laws of God Who introduced Himself to Israel at the start of the Ten Commandments with the words *אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ*, *I am HASHEM Your God* (Exodus 20:2). As the commentators explain, that statement constitutes the *mitzvah* לִהְיוֹת אֱלֹהִים, *to believe*, in HASHEM as the God Who is Master of all — and Who therefore has the absolute right to command obedience to His Torah.

Chazon Ish (*Emunah u'Bitachon* ch. 2) explains that Faith — or belief — in God has infinite degrees. Like all commandments involving intellect, emotions and character, it is fundamentally different from *mitzvos* relating to tangible matters. A *mezuzah*, for example, is either valid or it is not. A portion of meat is either kosher or it is not. If a *mezuzah* has missing letters, one cannot attach it to his doorpost with the declaration that he is in *partial* compliance with the *mitzvah* — an invalid *mezuzah* is no *mezuzah* at all.

If an animal was slaughtered with an improper knife, it is just as non-kosher as if it were killed on a guillotine; by definition one cannot eat partly kosher meat.

If an animal was slaughtered with an improper knife, it is just as non-kosher as if it were killed on a guillotine; by definition one cannot eat partly kosher meat.

Faith, however, is different; it can have degrees. Of course, a Jew is required to display total faith in God in every area of his life. There may be a *mitzvah*, or even a detail in the *halachah* of a particular commandment, that may seem incomprehensible according to currently fashionable social mores or according to science as it is currently known to man. Nevertheless, the Jew believes that the God Who created heaven and earth and Who brought Israel out of Egypt is the Supreme Authority with the right to command, whether or not man is capable of understanding the reasons for His doing so. Similarly, we must believe that God's hand is everywhere even if we cannot account for what He does. A study of history leaves us full of questions: Why should this have happened? Why didn't God show His mercy? Why did the wicked triumph? The questions can go on and on, but we have faith in God's wisdom and omnipotence despite His unwillingness to share His reasons with us.

A study of history leaves us full of questions. The questions can go on and on, but we have faith in God's wisdom.

Even someone whose belief in God goes only so far as to prevent him from ignoring the most widely accepted mitzvos cannot be labeled a non-believer.

Clearly, the Jew who does not consider himself bound by the *mitzvos* of the Torah or who denies that the entire Torah was given at Sinai is not in compliance with the commandment to believe. But he may not be a non-believer, either. *Chazon Ish* maintains that even someone whose belief in God goes only so far as to prevent him from ignoring the most widely accepted *mitzvos* — he will circumcise his sons or attend the synagogue on Yom Kippur — cannot be labeled a non-believer. True, his faith is so weak that it hangs by the slenderest hair, but it exists. Just as no two people are alike in their compliance with the commandments to be merciful, humble, or honest, no two people are alike in the degree of their belief. The absolute is everyone's goal, but their are infinite stations along the way.

The commandment to have בטחון, *trust*, in God, is similar, but different. R' *Bachya* writes:

ידוע כי כל הבוטח הוא מאמין, שאין אדם בוטח
אלא במי שמאמין בו שהיכולת בידו למלא את
שאלתו, והמאמין יתכן שלא יהיה בוטח

It is obvious that everyone who trusts is a believer, for one can trust only in Someone Whom he believes to have the power to fulfill his request, but it is possible for a believer not to trust (Kad HaKemach, Bitachon).

Although faith in God and trust in God are closely related, they are not synonymous.

Although faith in God and trust in God are closely related, they are not synonymous. As R' *Bachya* points out, one may have a perfect belief in God's existence, power, and authority, yet fail to translate it into trust, for 'trust in God' involves one's thoughts and deeds in a specific instance.

What happens when someone is confronted with a 'completely hopeless' situation? A dear one is terminally ill. One's business is deeply in debt and dependent on an obsolete product. A city is surrounded by a vastly superior army. Is there a God? Of course, one has total faith in that! Does his power extend over every conceivable situation? Surely! In that case, why the hopelessness? If the believer in the

abstract existence of God can translate his belief into a perfect, calm, unruffled trust that whatever his predicament, it is God's will, and further, that it is within God's power to effect whatever outcome He desires, then that person can be described as a *בְּטוּחַ*, *a person with trust*.

Trust involves that a person place his confidence in God alone and remember Him in every detail of his activities.

'Trust involves that a person place his confidence in God alone and remember Him in every detail of his activities, that he bear in mind that any situation is not in his own control, but that it depends on God's will. For there are many people who trust in God only in a general way, and who believe with a perfect faith that everything is in His blessed hands, but they fail to take to heart this essential of trust — namely, that He controls everything they do and every direction in which they turn' (*Kad HaKemach*).

As *Chazon Ish* succinctly puts it:

Faith and trust are [virtually] identical, except that 'faith' involves the general world view of a person while 'trust' involves his perspective on himself; faith is theoretical, while trust is practical. It is simple to have trust when trust is not truly required — but it is so difficult to trust when trust is truly required!

A further definition of trust is given by the commentators. There is a popular *misconception* that a devout Jew must have faith that whatever alternatives face him, only the good will occur. As a corollary to this, anyone who plans for the worst is regarded as lacking in faith. It is clear from *R' Bachya* that this is not so. Our duty is to recognize that only God controls results and only His will determines whether our efforts, reasoned or frantic, will succeed. Again, *Chazon Ish* expresses the concept concisely:

Unless the future has been clarified by prophecy, the future is not definite, for who can know God's judgment or His deeds?

Unless the future has been clarified by prophecy, the future is not definite, for who can know God's judgment or His deeds? Rather trust involves the faith that there is no coincidence in the world and that every occurrence under the sun was by His proclamation.

Degrees of Trust

There are no absolutes in such a mitzvah for today's maximum always becomes the springboard for tomorrow's greater achievement.

Trust in God, like other personal matters, is not an absolute concept. Its variations are infinite. *Meshech Chochmah* (Deuteronomy 10:20) comments that the Torah refers to this *mitzvah* only by allusion because it is impossible to be specific. Its degrees are so great that the individual Jew must struggle for a lifetime to climb the ladder of trust. The closer one comes to identify with God in all aspects of his life, the more he will trust Him. By recognizing that it is incumbent upon him to seek closeness to God's will and His example, as it were, in his every activity, a Jew learns to impregnate every aspect of his life with awareness of God's majesty. Such a person will naturally turn to God at times of illness and disaster. The *mitzvah* to trust, therefore, is subsumed under the general category of *וְבוּ תִרְבֶּקֶךָ*, *cleave to Him*. The Sages interpret this commandment as a call to imitate God's mercy, compassion, truthfulness, and so on. It involves a general and constant striving to approximate our behavior to His. There are no absolutes in such a *mitzvah* for today's maximum always becomes the springboard for tomorrow's greater achievement. So, too, with trust. When one cleaves to God, one trusts; and the closer one cleaves, the more he trusts.

Chovos HaLevavos' Spectrum

In infancy, the father was a distant, almost anonymous, figure, but with maturity a child recognizes his major role.

In the progress of the person of trust from infant to saint *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Shaar HaBitachon*) lists ten stations on the spectrum of trust:

- 1) The newborn baby instinctively trusts in its mother's breast.
- 2) As an infant grows, it learns to rely on its mother not only for nursing, but for all its physical needs.
- 3) A child learns that the family's livelihood is dependent on its father. In infancy, the father was a distant, almost anonymous, figure, but with maturity a child recognizes his major role.
- 4) The young adult comes to rely on his own strong right arm or business sense as an avenue to success. The new self-confidence and self-reliance eventually replace the earlier dependence on parents.

5) As one becomes aware of the interdependence of all members of the community, he comes to depend on the cooperation and support of fellow citizens.

6) The individual is strong and collective society is even stronger, but none of them can make the sun shine, the rains fall, or prevent drought and epidemic. The maturing person turns to God to do what he cannot do for himself.

7) As one's perception of God grows, one begins to realize that some forms of labor are too dangerous or too difficult to be worthy of man's effort — unless there is no other way for him to survive. If man has no choice he *must* take the risk. But now that he believes in God, he will forgo such risky pursuits in favor of a trust that God will provide for him in some other way.

If a man has no choice, he must take the risk. But now that he believes in God, he will forgo such risky pursuits.

8) If God can provide a better way than the risk of life and limb for the sake of bread, then He can also provide for everyone in every occupation. That being the case, one should devote himself to business or labor only because the Torah instructs us not to rely on miracles. At bottom, however, profits come not from labor or shrewdness, but from God, and every resource in life should be utilized for His service.

At bottom, however, profits come not from labor or shrewdness but from God.

9) Recognition of God's concern for His creatures becomes so all pervasive and trust becomes so total that the person gives up all personal desires in favor of the wish to serve God. It is no longer a matter of seeking success in order to serve God. Instead, this person is happy to endure success or failure, prosperity or poverty, health or illness, life or death — whatever God chooses to mete out.

10) The highest stage available to man is a recognition that nothing matters but the spiritual life of the World to Come. Though he must remain here as long as his body lives, his mind and heart are in another, spiritual world. Clearly, only a tiny number of the most sublime saints fall into this final category.

Joseph's Place

*All human beings
fall somewhere
within this
spectrum of trust.*

All human beings fall somewhere within this spectrum of trust. While all mature people would look disdainfully on people who never advance past the bottom rungs of the scale, we can scarcely comprehend the holiness of those who make it to the top. Whatever one's level happens to be at any given point in his life, he must consolidate himself on that level and strive to go higher, but to drop is unforgivable.

*We are not, and
should not be,
tolerant of people
who lapse toward
a less civilized
level of conduct.*

Let us depart a moment from spiritual considerations. Let us imagine someone whose awareness of God is limited or even non-existent, but he stands at level 5, that of appreciating his need to rely on others and to reciprocate by being a reliable, cooperative member of society. Suddenly, he drops back to level 4, where he becomes not only self-reliant, but selfish and indifferent to his comrades. On whatever grounds, religious, moral, or practical, such a reversion would be condemned and the person would deserve severe criticism. We are not, and should not be, tolerant of people who lapse toward a less civilized level of conduct. Similarly, a person who has developed an awareness of God's role in his life has no right to regress into total reliance on his neighbors or himself, even if he still acknowledges the need to pray for things like rain, which even self-delusion places beyond his control.

*He knew full well
that Pharaohs and
cupbearers were as
meaningless to
him as a newborn
ant on the other
side of the planet.*

Joseph knew that human agencies were powerless. He had attained the very highest stages in developing trust in God. He knew full well that Pharaoh's and cupbearers were as meaningless to him as a newborn ant on the other side of the planet. His level of trust was such that he relied on God alone and found his joy in accepting what God apportioned to him. Why should he have taken notice of the cupbearer's potential influence with Pharaoh; even Pharaoh's own power was insignificant to Joseph. Why then did he seek the cupbearer's help? Joseph perceived that God had placed the deposed official in prison only to set in motion the events that would rescue him. So Joseph took the initiative in broaching to the

cupbearer that he tell Pharaoh of the young, kidnapped, victimized Hebrew who deserved to be set free.

For another person, such an act would be commendable. More — it would be required! Just as we must plow, seek employment, and inquire after the best doctors, so we must utilize every available means of rescue. If we do so with the realization that plows, jobs, medicines, and influence are among the infinite means at God's disposal, such efforts place us high on *Chovos HaLevavos'* scale of trust in God. But this was *Joseph*. In enlisting the cupbearer in God's army of tools, Joseph was lowering himself — and for that he was punished with two additional years in prison, years during which he relearned the lesson of trust he had momentarily forgotten (*R' Bachya* 40:14; *Bais HaLevi*).

This, *Bais HaLevi* explains, is why the Midrash uses the very same verse to depict Joseph both as a man of trust and as one who was punished for relying on the arrogant. No one would be faulted; much less punished for what Joseph did — unless that person had reached Joseph's level of trust in God. We would never have realized how great Joseph was had we not been shown the amazingly high standard of conduct that God expected of him.

Chazon Ish offers a different explanation of Joseph's error, one that provides a scale of measurement for people like us, who can hardly imagine the spiritual grandeur of a Joseph. In the view of *Chazon Ish*, Joseph may well have been *required* to make efforts to obtain his release. The requirement to trust in God does not absolve us from seeking natural means instead of relying on miracles. Simultaneously, however, we must beware of wildly clutching at any straw, even if it holds no reasonable chance of success. To flounder and foolishly enlist unreliable allies and concoct illogical schemes for the sake of 'doing something' is wrong and sinful. It is tantamount to a declaration that God cannot help and that it makes more sense to hope to fools than to trust God. The Midrash implies the essence of Joseph's error by the description it assigns to the cupbearer: *רהקבים*, the ar-

In enlisting the
cupbearer in God's
army of tools,
Joseph was
lowering himself.

We would never
have realized how
great Joseph was
had we not been
shown the
amazingly high
standard of
conduct that God
expected of him.

To flounder and
foolishly enlist
unreliable allies
and concoct
illogical schemes
for the sake of
'doing something'
is wrong and
sinful.

rogant. It is the nature of people like him to be selfish. They are users. When he was the humble prisoner and Joseph was the overseer, when he was the perplexed dreamer and Joseph the brilliant interpreter, he obsequiously fawned upon Joseph, seeking his favor. Such people forget their benefactors immediately when the wheel of fortune turns, and Joseph should have realized it. That he failed to do so was indicative of a desperation that was unworthy of him and suggested a lapse in his trust in God.

Portion of Trust Rabbi David Feinstein has made a practice of analyzing the *masoretic* code words [mnemonics] at the end of each *sidrah*. These mnemonics are a device to assist in remembering the number of verses in the respective portions. The numerical value of each such mnemonic equals the number of verses in the portion. It is axiomatic that the mnemonics were carefully chosen to reflect the theme of each *sidrah*. Therefore, the fact that the mnemonic words of Mikeitz are the same as those for Bereishis — ‘Yechizkiyah’ and ‘Amatziah’ [יְחִזְקִיָּהוּ, אִמְצִיָּהוּ] — should give us pause. What theme do the two *sidros* share? Both words mean *power is God’s*. That theme is quite apropos to *Bereishis*, which begins with the account of how God created the universe from nothing, and closes with the prelude to the Deluge, in which God reduced the failed world to virtual nothingness. But what does *Mikeitz* tell us about God’s power?

The message is indeed there.

Egypt was the garden spot of the earth (13:11), the place that was so well irrigated by its god, the Nile, that a farmer could virtually drop seeds in the ground and be assured of lush growth (*Deuteronomy* 11:10). And Pharaoh stood above even the Nile, at least in his own mind [see *comm.* to 41:1]. Then God showed all of Egypt that the strength was *His* — not Pharaoh’s, not the Nile’s. Pharaoh’s dreams and Joseph’s interpretations proved that only God determines the cycles of abundance and famine. He was

Then God showed
all of Egypt that
the strength was
His — not
Pharaoh’s, not the
Nile’s.

still as much the Master as He had been during Creation.

Joseph's brothers found themselves at the mercy of a seemingly paranoid viceroy. They sought a reason for their plight and they found it: God was punishing them for their lack of pity twenty-two years earlier (42:21-22). Later, after apparently proving their innocence, they were arrested on another fabricated charge, and again they proclaimed their recognition that the affairs of men are not haphazard: the power is God's though He may exercise it through an Egyptian viceroy. So Judah spoke for his brothers in announcing that they could only remain speechless in the face of the Divine will that had chosen to seek retribution for their sin (44:16).

It is more than a coincidence that *Mikeitz* is always read during the Chanukah. The jug of oil was sufficient to burn for one day, but even *that* day is celebrated as part of the miracle because Jews recognize that *every* flame is a miracle, even when it seems to burn naturally.

This theme of *Mikeitz* first appears with mention of righteous Joseph who was to languish in prison for two years, because he had failed momentarily to realize that only God could decide whether or not He would unlock Joseph's chains with a key called 'chamberlain of the cupbearers.'

Yes. *Mikeitz* is indeed parallel to Bereishis. Both declare: the power is God's!

Yes, *Mikeitz* is indeed parallel to *Bereishis*. Both declare 'the power is God's!'

Rabbi Nosson Scherman

סדר מקץ

Sidrah Mikeitz

מקץ ויהי מקץ שנתים ימים ופרעה חלם מא/א-ב ב והנה עמד על-היאר: והנה מן-היאר

XLI

SIDRA MIKEITZ

1. Pharaoh's dream.

יהי מקץ שנתים ימים — [And] it happened at the end of two years to the day [lit. two years of days].

— After the release of the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers — a total of twelve years since Joseph's imprisonment (Rabbinic Chronology based upon *Seder Olam*; see *comm.* to 39:20; 40:14). At this point, Joseph was almost thirty years old, Jacob 120, and Isaac 180. Isaac died about this time. (See footnote to 35:29, p. 1529).

Joseph should have, according to Heavenly decree, been sentenced to be imprisoned for ten years, but as noted in the commentary to the previous *Sidrah* [see 40:14 and 23], because he placed his trust in the dual 'remembrance' of the cupbearer, he was punished with two extra years in prison. As noted there, the *Midrash* applies to Joseph the verse [Psalms 40:5]: *Praises to the man who made HASHEM his trust and turned not to the 'arrogant'* — a reference to the Egyptians who are so described in *Isaiah* 30:7. [See *Overview*].

Baal HaTurim finds a homiletic allusion to these ten years in the phraseology itself; A similar expression occurs in 16:3: *at the end* [מקץ] of ten years. Just as there the term is related to ten years, in our passage, too, it al-

ludes to ten years, to which the additional שנתים, two years, are added.

Midrash Sechel Tov observes that the term יהי [it was] can denote both joy and grief [for only in conjunction with כימי does יהי denote only grief]. It is used in this introductory phrase to allude to both the grief of Isaac's passing and the joy of Joseph's impending release from prison.

The translation of מקץ is as *Onkelos* renders it: מסוף, at the end. This is the interpretation of the word throughout Scripture (*Rashi*).⁽¹⁾

It is not unusual that *Rashi* offers his interpretation of מקץ here, but not the previous times the word appears in Scripture [e.g. 4:3, 81:6, 16:3] (*Mizrachi*). Perhaps *Rashi* felt the particular necessity to comment here because the presence of the word ימים, which also denotes completeness, renders our passage more prone to ambiguity (*Tzeidah laDerech*).

Our translation two years to the day follows the interpretation of *Ibn Ezra* and other commentators [see e.g. *Rashi* to 24:55 and *comm.* above to 40:4] who perceive ימים, days, to denote a complete cycle of days — i.e., a cycle of time, a year, when the same date recurs; hence in our context two years to the day. Comp. Lev. 25:9 and the expression חודש ימים, a month of days [Numbers 11:21] where the sense is a full month — the recurrence of the same date within the full cycle of a month.

ופרעה חלם — That [lit. and] Pharaoh was dreaming [following *Ibn Ezra*; comp. 27:5.]

1. *Rashi* cites *Onkelos* to make clear that מקץ in our verse is to be translated as *at the end*, and should not be confused with the cognate word קצה, edge. Were we to render מקץ as from the edge, it could be understood to refer either to the beginning [i.e., 'the cutting edge,' so to speak] of the two-year period, or to its end.

Cf. *comm.* to Deut. 15:1 regarding the cancellation of financial debts at the end of the Sabatical year [Shmittah]: מקץ שבע שנים, at the end of seven years. There, some grammarians (see *Ibn Ezra*) interpret the literal sense of the passage as the beginning of the seventh year. Not only would that rendering contradict *Rashi* to our verse, it is also contrary to the Talmudic, halachically adopted interpretation of מקץ as end. [See *Ramban* there who defends the halachic interpretation. Cf. also *Rashbam* here who maintains that were it not for the qualifying word ימים, days, in our passage which clearly denotes full years [see below], one would be justified in interpreting מקץ as the beginning of the second year.]

It happened at the end of two years to the day: Pharaoh was dreaming that behold! he was standing over the River, ² when behold! out of the

The present tense, *was dreaming*, may indicate that the dream was a recurring one that Pharaoh kept dreaming throughout the two years, but that he always forgot in the morning. That night, however, it made an indelible impression on him (*Midrash HaGadol*).

Sforno renders: *While Pharaoh was dreaming*, meaning that while the king was dreaming of typical fantasies that absorbed his mind, he also had the following dream, about the cows that, unlike the others, had significance. As the Sages observed [*Berachos* 55a], in every dream there must be meaningless elements.

Pharaoh was not the name of an individual but the royal title of the Egyptian kings, just as Abimelech was the royal title of Philistine monarchs.⁽¹⁾

Ordinarily the passage should have read in the converse, predicate+subject: וַיִּהְיֶה עַד שְׁנֵי שָׁנִים וְיָמֵי (וַיִּהְיֶה עַד שְׁנֵי שָׁנִים וְיָמֵי). That the subject precedes the verb in our verse is the Scriptural method of emphasizing the uniqueness of the subject: this was *Pharaoh* — no private citizen — who was dreaming. This was a dream which affected a whole nation, not merely an individual, and it must be perceived and interpreted as such. In this light the Sages in the *Midrash* expounded: *'Pharaoh was dreaming. Do not all people dream? — True, but a king's dream affects the whole nation.'* It was this universal aspect of the dream that eluded the Egyptian necromancers who could not interpret the dream *vis a vis* Pharaoh [see *comm.* to v. 8] (*Malbim*).

It is noted that dreams were at the root of Joseph's misfortunes; and now dreams bring about his salvation. This is reminiscent of *Jeremiah* 30:17: *I will heal you with your own wounds* (*Zohar*).

וַיִּהְיֶה עַד שְׁנֵי שָׁנִים וְיָמֵי — *That* [lit. and] *behold! he was standing over* [lit. upon] *the River*.

The expression עַד שְׁנֵי שָׁנִים וְיָמֵי, literally *standing upon*, can refer to the place next to which someone stands, as well as figuratively to the place where one's mind and thoughts are directed [cf. *Exod.* 18:13; *Daniel* 12:1; see also *comm.* to 28:13 above]. Accordingly, the implication is that Pharaoh, King of Egypt, was standing next to the river, reflecting upon it. His thoughts focused in the Nile, upon whose overflow depended the agricultural productivity of Egypt (*R' Hirsch*).

The Nile was venerated as a god of Egypt. Midrashically, therefore, Pharaoh's position 'over' the Nile suggests that he haughtily imagined himself superior to his god; Pharaoh was protecting it, like a god looking down on his river. Cf. *Ezekiel* 29:3 where Pharaoh is exhorted for having boasted *My river is mine and I have made it*. As noted earlier, the present tense *Pharaoh dreams* implies that Pharaoh constantly had such grandiose dreams. He believed himself to be a god, the all-powerful creator of Egyptian prosperity due to 'his river' the Nile.

Further, the *Midrash* derives from this expression that 'the wicked stand over their gods; however, as for the

1. *R' Munk* observes that Pharaoh's ultimate decline, foretold in *Ezekiel* 29:3, was connected to his fancying himself as god of the Nile [see *comm.*]. This was foreseen right from the start, and the Torah alludes to it throughout this episode by omitting the title 'king of Egypt' from Pharaoh's name. The sole exception is the solemn announcement of Joseph's accession to power: *Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt* [v. 46].

עַלֹּת שֶׁבַע פְּרוֹת יְפוֹת מֵרָאָה וּבְרִיאַת
בָּשָׂר וַתִּרְעֶנָּה בְּאָחוּ: וְהִנֵּה שֶׁבַע פְּרוֹת
אַחֲרוֹת עֹלוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן מִן־הַיָּאֵר רָעוֹת
מֵרָאָה וְדָקוֹת בָּשָׂר וַתַּעֲמִדְנָה אֶצֶל

מִקֵּץ
מֵא/ג

righteous, God stands over them, as it is written of Jacob [28:13]: *Behold! HASHEM was standing over him.*

[Comp. v. 17 where in Pharaoh's repetition of the dream he delicately changes the implication by saying instead that he was standing upon the bank of the river.]

Rashi notes that our verse avoids the use of נָהָר, the word Scripture invariably employs for river. This is because יָאֵר means canal, and Egypt, while depending on the Nile for virtually all its irrigation, was criss-crossed with a network of canals drawing water from overflow of the Nile. Therefore, the word יָאֵר is used exclusively for the Nile, because it was not only a river, but the center of the entire series of canals.

[In the translation we have capitalized the word River, because in Egypt the Nile was the river *par excellence*.]

[The Nile's annual overflow — a time of great rejoicing in Egypt — is the product of the spring rains in the Abyssinian highlands, and the melting of the mountain snow.]

Ramban, citing *Daniel* 10:4-5 and 12:5-6 where the Tigris is referred to both as נָהָר and יָאֵר, maintains that the term יָאֵר can apply to any river, whether or not it is part of a network of canals. Large rivers are referred to by both terms, while canals are referred to exclusively as יָאֵר.

Basing himself on *Onkelos* who translates יָאֵר as נְהָרָא — [from the Hebrew נָהָר, river], *Ramban* suggests that both terms are derived from אֹר, light. In *Job*, the rain is referred to as light [see *ibid.* 36:30; 37:11; *Bereishis Rabbah* 26:18], perhaps because the rains are influenced by the luminaries; accordingly, the rivers, products of these rains, are related to the luminaries, their first cause.

In defense of *Rashi's* interpretation, the supercommentators urge that, one should

not conclude that *Rashi* overlooked the verse in *Daniel* where the Tigris is called יָאֵר. Rather, the implication of *Rashi's* comment here is that only the Nile is referred to simply as הַיָּאֵר, the river, with the definite article הַ, without the need for any other identification. In Egypt, the Nile was the river/canal *par excellence*. While it is true that the word הַיָּאֵר, the river, with the definite article הַ occurs in *Daniel* 12:5 to designate the Tigris, that is only because the Tigris had already been named earlier [10:4] and this word referred to the earlier verse (see *Gur Aryeh*; *Tzeidah l'Derech*; *Maskil l'David*).

[On the implication of the term וְהִנֵּה in dreams denoting *perceptive substance* rather than fantasy, see *comm.* to 28:13 (p. 1228). Its interpretation, as noted by *Ibn Ezra* and *Ramban* (see *comm.* to 40:9) is: *It was as if.*]

2. וְהִנֵּה מִן הַיָּאֵר עֹלוֹת שֶׁבַע פְּרוֹת — *When [lit. and] behold! out of the River there emerged [lit. came up] seven cows.*

The symbolism is clear: Since famine and abundance in Egypt depend on the overflow of the Nile, Pharaoh saw the cows — which symbolize plowing [since oxen are usually harnessed for this purpose] — coming up from the river (*Ramban*).

The order of the phrase should have been *there emerged seven cows from the river*. That the river is mentioned first emphasizes that in the symbolism of the dream, the cows originated in the river — the Source of Egypt's sustenance; they were not ordinary cows that had gone from dry land into the river and were now leaving it (*Or HaChaim*).

The Nile overflows and dispenses

- 41 River there emerged seven cows, beautiful, and
 3 robust, and they were grazing in the marshland.
 3 Then behold! seven other cows emerged after them
 out of the River — ugly and gaunt; and they stood

its gifts only once a year. Accordingly, the seven cows emerging from the Nile indicated seven years; this applied also to the seven ears of grain, each representing one annual crop (R' Hirsch).

Beautiful — יפות מראה ובריאות בשר [of appearance] and **robust** [following *Ralbag*; [lit. healthy in flesh].

I.e., fattened [indicating well-fed] (Rambam, *comm.* to *Mishnah Shabbos* 20:4).

That the cows were beautiful alludes to years of plenty when people look favorably upon one another (Rashi).

It is not Rashi's intent to interpret the dream. He explains this segment of the dream here only because Joseph does not account for it in his interpretation in v. 26 below (*Gur Aryeh*). Joseph's omission was because Pharaoh himself in repeating the dream did not use the term *יפת מראה* which denotes, as Rashi writes in 29:17 a beautiful complexion, a term which is clearly unsuitable for animals. Pharaoh substituted the more suitable term *יפות חזק*, handsome of form. Therefore Rashi offered his comment here to explain why the Torah used this term to denote the period of plenty (*Maskil l'David*).

And they were grazing in the marshland. — נתרעוהו בקאחו

They remained there in Egypt — on the banks of the Nile — indicating that the years of plenty would be only in Egypt [see verses 29-30]. Accordingly, the other lands would have been unable to store up food even had they heard about the impending famine. That the famine was universal is foreshadowed in the dream by the fact that after the lean ones consumed the fat ones they did not remain there [i.e., in

Egypt], but dispersed as Pharaoh awoke (*Ramban*).

The translation in the *marshland* follows Rashi who also cites the word in *Job* 8:11.

Ramban, however, disagrees. Citing the same verse in *Job*, he maintains that the word *אחו* refers not to a marshland but to reed grass and other vegetation that grow on river banks. He suggests that Rashi may hold that the word is used interchangeably for both reed grass and marshland. Furthermore, in this context the preposition *ב*, in, should be understood as meaning *of*, i.e., and they fed of the reed grass which was on the bank of the river. A similar use of this preposition occurs in *Proverbs* 9:5: *come eat* *בְּלֶחְמִי וּבְיַיִן* of the wine which I have mingled. Possibly, *אחו* might be derived from *אחנה*, brotherhood, indicating a place where many varieties of grass grow together.

The Midrash, similarly interpreting *אחו* as denoting brotherhood, perceives the symbolism of the grazing area as figuratively portraying the love and brotherliness men feel toward one another in prosperous times.

3. והנה שבע פרות אחרות — Then [lit. and] behold — seven other cows.

Symbolic of another season of plowing (*Ralbag*)...

Emerged [lit. came up] — עלות אחריהן מן הניאר

— I.e., immediately after them (*Abarbanel*).

Thus intimating that famine would follow on the heels of the plenty (*Haamek Davar*).

[In recapitulating the dream in v. 19, Pharaoh omitted the phrase *מן הניאר*, out of the river. See *comm.* there.]

Ugly [lit. bad in appearance] and **gaunt** [lit. of lean flesh]. — רעות מראה ונקות בשר

An unusual sight in Egypt [see v. 19].

מקץ מא/דה הַפְּרוֹת עַל-שֹׁפֶת הַיָּאֵר: וְחֹאכֵלָהּ
הַפְּרוֹת רָעוֹת הַמְּרָאָה וְדָקָת הַבֶּשֶׂר אֶת
שֶׁבַע הַפְּרוֹת יָפֹת הַמְּרָאָה וְהַכְּרִיאַת
ה וַיִּקֶּץ פֶּרְעֹה: וַיִּשָּׁן וַיַּחֲלֶם שְׁנֵית וְהִנֵּה |
שֶׁבַע שְׂבָלִים עֲלוֹת בָּקָה אֶחָד בְּרִיאֹת

— נחצמנה אצל הפרות על שפת היאר
And they stood next to the cows on the bank of the River.

They did not graze, but merely stood near the first cows (*Radak*).^[1]

This [sequence of the fat cows followed by the lean cows that stood beside them] indicated that the years of famine would immediately follow the years of plenty with no lapse of time between them (*Ramban*).

When he related his dream to Joseph in v. 23, Pharaoh did not mention this detail (*Ramban*). [See "Pharaoh's Dream: Variations and Nuances" in the *comm.* to v. 17, and chart there.]

According to *Sforno*, that the lean cows stood alongside the fat ones for some time before consuming them, symbolized that for a period of time there would be both famine and plenty, as it is written [v. 54 below]: *there was famine in all the lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.*

4. ... וְחֹאכֵלָהּ — *The ugly gaunt cows then ate up the seven beautiful [and] robust cows.*

This symbolized that all the joy

of the years of plenty would be forgotten during the famine (*Rashi*).

[*Rashi* alludes to Joseph's prediction in v. 30: *And all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten.*]

According to *Ramban*, the symbolism of the emaciated cows 'eating' the fat ones was that the years of famine would consume the years of abundance in the sense that the abundant years would have to provide food for the years of famine. This vision prompted Joseph to advise Pharaoh that they should store food as a reserve against the famine [verses 35-36]. Ordinarily Joseph would not have dared offer the king unsolicited counsel; only because this was an integral part of the interpretation of the dream itself did he presume to offer the proposition. [Comp. *R' Hirsch* in footnote to previous verse.]^[2]

וַיִּקֶּץ פֶּרְעֹה — *And Pharaoh awoke.*

The appearance of the bad cows gave him such a shock that he woke up (*R' Hirsch*).

Radak explains that Pharaoh's

1. *R' Hirsch* makes a similar observation. Apparently, by the time the lean cows emerged, the fat cows had consumed all the available grass. Cows are not cannibalistic. Hunger would never have made the lean cows eat the others had food been left in the meadow. Clearly, therefore, the dream taught symbolically that the Egyptians should not consume the entire produce in the years of plenty.

2. The commentators to *Rashi* defend his interpretation by explaining that the difference between *Rashi* and *Ramban* lies chiefly in their understanding of the metaphorical implications of the term אכל, *eating up* or *devouring*. As *Mizrachi* observes, *eating* can imply the destruction of the food and its disappearance. According to *Rashi*, the fact that the lean cows

next to the cows on the bank of the River. ⁴ The ugly, gaunt cows then ate up the seven beautiful, robust cows. And Pharaoh awoke. ⁵ He fell asleep and dreamt a second time, and behold! seven ears of grain were sprouting on a single stalk — healthy and good.

awakening between dreams was necessary. The break and repetition made it clear that these were not *additional* but parallel symbolisms, and that they would materialize quickly [see v. 32].

Akeidas Yitzchak cites an opinion that Pharaoh did not really wake up at this point, but that this was part of the dream: he saw himself awaken and fall back to sleep.

5. But Pharaoh was not fully awake, so before he could be aware that it was only a dream, he went to sleep again and went on dreaming (Rashbam; R' Hirsch).

וַיִּשָּׁן וַיִּחְלֶם שְׁנִית [And] he fell asleep and [he] dreamt a second time.

The passage does not read *and he*

dreamt עוֹר, more, but he dreamt שְׁנִית, a second time to intimate that it was essentially a single dream which was being repeated (Kli Yakar).

Midrash HaGadol perceives שְׁנִית as implying that this dream was *incredible* (from מְשֻׁנָּה, different, out of the ordinary). The first dream showed animals devouring each other, which is within the realm of the imagination — but how can inanimate ears of grain swallow one another? Hence, the *second* 'incredible' dream, not the first, troubled Pharaoh's spirit.

וְהָיָה שִׁבְעֵי שְׂבָלִים עַל־וֶטֶן אֶחָד בְּרִיאֹת וְטֹבוֹת — And behold! seven ears of grain were sprouting up [lit. going up] on a single stalk — healthy and good.

devoided the fat ones without any visible improvement in their own state, expresses the eating in terms of the *destruction of the object eaten*, rather than the beneficial effect on the eater. Consequently Rashi perceives the eating of the fat cows by the lean ones as symbolizing the forgetting of the period of plenty during the days of famine.

Rashi's basis for this understanding is the dream of the stalks where Pharaoh was shown that the thin stalks 'swallowed' the healthy ones [v. 8]. Now certainly such 'swallowing' had no beneficial effect on the swallowing stalks; it only symbolized that the swallowed object is destroyed and out of sight. Therefore, in v. 30, s.v. *and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten*, Rashi writes that it is the interpretation of the 'swallowing' [of the stalks] and does not mention the 'eating' of the cows, for it was on that basis that he gained his understanding of the fact that the eating of the cows metaphorically implied the destruction of the object eaten and not its beneficial effect on the eater.

Ramban, on the other hand, maintains that Joseph — the stranger, slave, and prisoner summoned from the dungeon only to interpret the dream — would never have dared volunteer his own advice to the king. That he did so can be comprehended only if his words were part of the interpretation. According to Ramban, then, the lean eating the fat symbolized the lean years living on the surplus of the fat ones. The eating is conceived in terms of its *nutritious effect on the consumer* [i.e., during the years of famine, Egypt would be sustained by the surplus of the good years — hence Joseph's 'advice' was an integral part of the interpretation]. Rashi's and Ramban's differing conceptions of the eating stem from conflicting views of Joseph's 'advice', with Rashi apparently maintaining that Joseph, perceiving the guiding Hand of Providence in this audience with Pharaoh, seized the opportunity of offering his unsolicited advice — Joseph assumed that Pharaoh would not have been shown this portentous dream unless he, as head of state, was expected to take constructive measures to prepare for the famine. For as Ramban himself makes clear in v. 36, the dream itself indicated that the land would not perish in the famine, for the lean cows, though remaining emaciated even after having eaten the seven fat cows, nevertheless did not die of hunger (see Mizrahi; Gur Aryeh; Maharshah).

מקץ וטבות: והנה שבע שבלים דקות
 מא/ו ושדופת קדים צמחות אחריהן:
 ותבלענה השבלים הדקות את שבע
 השבלים הבריאות והמלאות וייקץ
 ח פרעה והנה חלום: ויהי בכקר ותפסם

Grain is a symbol of harvest (Ramban v. 2); that one stalk had seven ears indicated abundance (Rashbam).

The seven ears of grain sprouting on a single stalk also indicated that the prosperity would be centralized in one area, Egypt [see verses 29-30]. The thin and scorched ears, by contrast, were on separate stalks (v. 6) presaging that the famine would be widespread throughout all the lands (Haamek Davar).

Furthermore, *healthy and good* ears sprouting on one stalk also reflected the cooperative, sharing disposition of people in times of abundant prosperity (Oznaim l'Torah).

Rashi makes the etymological note that בריאות [healthy] (an adjective generally used only to modify a human being) is synonymous with *sains* [healthy] in Old French [and hence, like the French, is occasionally used to describe an inanimate object (Mizrachi).] See Ibn Ezra and Haamek Davar cited in v. 22 s.v. מלאות.

[The description *healthy and good* modifies the *seven ears of grain* as the plural of the Hebrew נטבות וטבות makes clear. The sense of the syntax may best be captured by rendering: *And behold — seven healthy and good ears of grain were sprouting up on one stalk.*]

6. דקות ושדופת קדים — *Thin and scorched by the east wind.*

This intimated that any attempt to harvest [symbolized, as noted, by the ears of grain], would be unsuccessful. All the new crops would be scorched by the east wind (Ramban).

In explaining the term שדופת, Rashi cites the Old French word *heiles* meaning scorched. He notes also that Onkelos renders it שקיץ, *beaten*,

related to the noun מקשוף, *a lintel*, which is beaten continually by the door knocking against it. קדים, lit. *easterly*, refers to the *east wind* [wind being implicit in the elliptic expression] (Rashi).

[The scorching eastern wind, the *sirocco*, referred to today as *chamsin*, is noted for its oppressive severity. Cf. Ezekiel 19:12: *the east wind withered its fruit*. In Jonah 4:8 it is a *stifling east wind* that caused Jonah extreme discomfort. These burning winds often spring up suddenly with great violence from the desert. They so parch and wither vegetation that the it becomes completely inedible.

[Rashi to Exodus 14:21 observes that the east wind is the most powerful of all winds. It is the wind by which the Holy One Blessed be He exacts punishment from the wicked. See Jeremiah 18:17; Isaiah 27:8. In Hosea 12 *the wind blowing from the east* is portrayed as a *wind from HASHEM*.]

צמחות אחריהן — *Were growing after them.*

Although the verb is technically in present tense it does not imply that Pharaoh saw them in the process of *growing*. Rather he saw them *fully grown*, as if the phrase read: [the scorched stalks] *grew after them*. The connotation of this verb form is that as soon as he saw the good stalks, he saw the bad ones. Every facet of the dream included such portents of immediacy (Ramban).

7. ותבלענה — *Then the seven thin ears swallowed up the seven healthy and full ears.*

[On the symbolism, see v. 4 s.v. ונתאבלענה.]

The translation of ותבלענה as *swallowed* follows Onkelos:

⁶ And suddenly! seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, were growing after them. ⁷ Then the seven thin ears swallowed up the seven healthy and full ears. Pharaoh awoke and behold! it had been a dream.

⁸ And it was in the morning: his spirit was agitated

The verb *וַתֹּאכְלֶנָּה*, *ate*, is not used here as it is in connection with the cows [v. 4] for it would be inappropriate to describe plant-life as 'eating' (R' Avraham ben HaRambam).

Chizkuni maintains that the thin ears outgrew and covered up the full ears. The verb *בָּלַע* should thus be interpreted covered as in Numbers 4:20. One should not interpret that the thin ears literally swallowed up the full ears since prophetic dreams do not contain the utterly impossible, such as an elephant going through the eye of a needle [comp. Berachos 55b].

וְהַקְרִיאוֹת וְהַקְלָאוֹת — Healthy and full.

The Torah emphasizes further that though the seven ears were growing from one stalk, they had not robbed nourishment from one another, but each ear of grain was healthy as well as full (Chizkuni).

וַיִּקֶץ פַּרְעֹה וְהִנֵּה חֲלוֹם — [And] Pharaoh awoke and behold! it had been a dream.

I.e., behold — what was evidently a complete dream ended, and he was in need of interpreters (Rashi).

That is, since he did not fall asleep again — it being almost morning — he knew that the dream was completed (Nachalas Yaakov).

According to R' Hirsch: He woke up and lo! it was a dream! The impact of the dream had been so strong that Pharaoh thought he had seen a real event. Only when he was fully awake did he realize that it had been only a dream. [Rashbam and Malbim interpret similarly.]

According to Ramban: When

Pharaoh got up he understood that it was but one dream. Therefore when relating it to Joseph he constantly referred to it as his dream — not dreams. Pharaoh's wise men, however, perceived it as two different dreams and tried to interpret it accordingly. See comm. to v. 8 s.v. וַיִּקֶּץ.

8. וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר נִתְפָּעַם רִחוֹ — And it was in the morning: [and] his spirit was agitated.

And it was in the morning — the morning that Providence had ordained for Joseph's release (Midrash HaGadol).

Following Onkelos: his spirit rang within him like a bell [פָּעָמוֹן=פָּעָם]. In describing Nebuchadnezzar's similar reaction to a dream, however, the word is spelled [Daniel 2:1]: וַתִּתְפָּעֶם רִחוֹ [with two n's, to imply that there were two sources of agitation (Mizrachi; cf. Gur Aryeh)]. This is because Nebuchadnezzar had two reasons to be agitated: [like Pharaoh] he sought an interpretation, but additionally, he had forgotten the dream (Rashi; see comm. to ArtScroll Daniel ibid.).

R' David Feinstein notes that וַתִּתְפָּעֶם in Nebuchadnezzar's case is in the *his'paal* [reflexive] form. This implies that his agitation was so great because he 'worked himself into a frenzy.'

Radak renders: His spirit was knocked, beaten over the anxiety caused by the dream. Ibn Ezra

רוחו וישלח ויקרא את־כל־חרטמי
מצרים ואת־כל־חכמיה ויספר פרעה
להם את־חלמו ואין־פותר אותם
ט לפרעה: וידבר שר המשקים את־פרעה
לאמר את־חטאי אני מזכיר היום:

renders similarly; see verb פעם in *Psalms* 77:5; *Isaiah* 41:7.

He was especially agitated because ניהי בקר this dream had occurred near morning, and what one dreams in the morning has substance (*Alshich*; see *Maharsha* to *Berachos* 55b).

וישלח ויקרא את־כל־חרטמי מצרים — So he sent and summoned [lit. called] all the necromancers of Egypt.

He sent and summoned — i.e., he dispatched emissaries to summon them (*Radak*).

The term חרטמים has the general connotation of *magician* or *soothsayer*. The translation *necromancer* follows *Rashi* who perceives the term as a composite of חר טם — referring to הנחרים בטימי מתים, those who 'excite' themselves by the bones of the dead — i.e., who inquire of the dead.

R' Hirsch explains the term — which he perceives as derived from חרט, *chisel*; engrave — to refer to those versed in hieroglyphics. As people who devoted themselves to the meaning of symbols, they were the best qualified to explain a dream.

Abarbanel and *Malbim* render: *wizards*; fortune tellers.

ואת־כל־חכמיה — And all its wise men.

— Astrologers (*Malbim*).

ויספר ... את חלמו ואין־פותר אותם לפרעה — Pharaoh related his dream to them but none [could] interpret them for [lit. to] Pharaoh [lit. but there was no interpreter of them to Pharaoh].

There were interpreters, but no one who could interpret it suitably for Pharaoh — i.e., in reference to Pharaoh, for none of their interpretations satisfied him. [They offered interpretations applicable to him as an individual, but not as a Pharaoh; they failed to realize that the dream of a king must have nationalistic implications for the nation as a whole (see *Malbim* to v. 1)]. An example of their interpretations was: Pharaoh will beget seven daughters and bury seven daughters [he will conquer seven provinces and seven provinces will rebel against him] (*Rashi*; bracketed addition is from the *Midrash*) [cf. 40:8].¹¹

According to *Haamek Davar*, the Egyptian wizards could not formulate a correct interpretation since they could not conceive how a king could be affected personally by hunger; therefore they sought far-fetched solutions.

Pharaoh referred to his dream in singular, but the wise men regarded it as two dreams and tried to interpret accordingly. That is why our passage reads: Pharaoh related them his dream but none could interpret

1. If, as noted in *Berachos* 55b and cited in the footnote to v. 13, 'the outcome of every dream depends on its interpretation' why then were the interpretations of the wise men not effective in determining the meaning of Pharaoh's dream?

— Essentially, as Rava cautions in the Talmud (*ibid.*), the outcome of a dream depends on its

41 so he sent and summoned all the necromancers of
 9 Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh related his dream
 to them but none could interpret them for Pharaoh.
 9 Then the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers spoke
 up before Pharaoh, "My transgressions do I mention

them for Pharaoh (Ramban v. 7).

Their erroneous explanations stemmed from a failure to perceive that the dreams were but the two halves of one message: the first dream alluded to the physical phenomenon of animals plowing fields, while the second dream alluded to the prosperity and hunger of the respective seven-year periods. By failing to connect these two parts of the message, the necromancers could not understand the dreams properly (Sforzo).

According to *Ashtroc* in *Midrashei HaTorah*, some of the wizards *did* perceive the essential significance of the dream, but none of them could verbalize the calamities that the dreams portended.

9. The chamberlain of the cupbearers 'remembers' Joseph.

Then [lit. and] the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers spoke up before [lit. with] Pharaoh.

Seeing Pharaoh's anguished state, the chamberlain realized that he was putting himself in great danger by withholding his personal knowledge of someone who could interpret Pharaoh's dream correctly. He saw that Pharaoh was ready to expire, and he reasoned to himself:

'If this Pharaoh dies and another succeeds him, I have no way of being certain whether the new king will retain me in office or not; therefore I had better enhance my position with this Pharaoh and tell him about Joseph before he dies of grief' (Midrash).

The cupbearer's own experience had shown that a dreamer can instinctively recognize the correctness of a valid interpretation. He therefore spoke up, 'I can understand why none of these explanations satisfy you; I was once in the same position' (R' Hirsch).

Haamek Davar notes the lack of the preposition *אֶל*, *to*. Furthermore the word *וַיִּכְבֵּר*, *and he spoke*, implies a harshness as opposed to *וַיֹּאמֶר*, *and he said*, which suggests normal conversation. He comments, therefore, that the chamberlain spoke harshly to himself, reproaching himself for not having told Pharaoh about Joseph, the one person who could set his mind to ease.

R' David Feinstein similarly detects a harshness in the phraseology, as if the Chamberlain was bitter at the very fact that he now had to evoke memories of an incident he would rather forget.

According to *Moshav Zekeinim* the sense of this phraseology *אֶל* (*וַיִּכְבֵּר*) is that the cupbearer spoke in the presence of Pharaoh, i.e., addressing his courtiers, while referring to the king in respectful third person.

אֶת חַטָּאתִי אֲנִי מְקַבֵּר הַיּוֹם — My transgressions do I mention today.

I.e., even though I will have to recall my sins to make this revela-

interpretation only when the interpretation is in conformity with the dream. In this case the Egyptian wizards entirely missed the significance of the dream — perceiving it as affecting Pharaoh the individual and interpreting both dreams separately rather than as one repeated entity; hence their interpretations were meaningless. Furthermore, Joseph stipulated that in Pharaoh's case it is *God Who will respond to Pharaoh's welfare* [v. 16], and the interpretation of such dreams are in God's exclusive Province — He and only He — determines who shall be His emissary in interpreting it (see *comm.* to 40:8). (Cf. *Maharsha* to *Berachos* *ibid.*).

מִקֵּץ מַא/יִיב
 , פָּרַעָה קָצַף עַל-עַבְדָּיו וַיִּתֵּן אֹתִי בַּמִּשְׁמֶר
 בֵּית שַׂר הַטִּבְחִים אֹתִי וְאֵת שַׂר הָאֲפִים:
 וַנִּחְלָמָה חֲלוֹם בַּלַּיְלָה אֶחָד אֲנִי וְהוּא
 יֵשׁ בְּפִתְרוֹן חֲלָמוֹ חֲלָמָנוּ: וְשֵׁם אֲתָנוּ
 נֶעַר עַבְדֵי עֶבֶד לְשַׂר הַטִּבְחִים וְנִסְפָּר-לוֹ

tion, I will do it for the sake of your majesty — to tell you of my personal knowledge of an interpreter (*Radak; Ibn Ezra*).

Although I am about to mention my incarceration, I do not complain nor do I impugn Pharaoh's justice; for it was in punishment for my sins that I was imprisoned (*Alshich; Sforino*).

My offenses (in plural) — my sin against Pharaoh, and my sin against Joseph in forgetting my promise to him (*Chizkuni*).

— I am doubly guilty: firstly, by not having shown Joseph kindness by mentioning him to you; and secondly, in watching you suffer without telling you that he will know its meaning (*Midrash*).

10. פָּרַעָה קָצַף עַל עַבְדֵי — *Pharaoh had [once] become incensed [see above] at his servants.*

It is clear from this verse that Pharaoh was the royal title, not a personal name, for it would have otherwise been presumptuous for the cupbearer — or Joseph in v. 15 — to have addressed the king as 'Pharaoh' if that were his own name. Cf. Pharaoh-Necho in *Jeremiah* 46:2 where Pharaoh is the royal title and Necho his personal name (*Ibn Ezra; Rashbam; Lekach Tov*).

אֹתִי וְאֵת שַׂר הָאֲפִים — *Me and the Chamberlain of the Bakers.*

Both of us were equally charged with the same crime — offending

the king. Nothing about our crime or treatment could have suggested our ultimate fate so that Joseph could tailor his interpretations to fit the situation (*Abarbanel*).

The double use of אֲנִי in this verse is not redundant but stylistic. Cf. double use of אֲנִי above 37:30 (*Ibn Ezra*).

11. וַנִּחְלָמָה חֲלוֹם בַּלַּיְלָה אֶחָד אֲנִי וְהוּא — *[And] we dreamt a dream on the same [lit. one] night — I and he.*

Both our dreams appeared alike. They were so similar that they would have misled any but the most Divinely inspired interpreter. Moreover, since both dreams occurred on one night, the interpreter could have assumed that the same astrological influences would cause both our fates to be the same (*Abarbanel; Akeidah*).

אִישׁ בְּפִתְרוֹן חֲלָמוֹ חֲלָמָנוּ — *Each of us dreamt according to the interpretation of his dream.*

— I.e., each dream corresponded exactly with the interpretation that was given us [unlike the irrelevant interpretations offered you by your savants] (*Rashi*).

— Every detail of each dream was relevant to its interpretation; there was nothing extraneous in them (*Akeidah*).

According to *Ramban* and *Ibn Ezra* to 40:5: Each dream faithfully prognosticated the future indicating that it was a true prophetic dream, not the kind which comes as a result of anxiety.

41 today. ¹⁰ Pharaoh had once become incensed at his
 10-12 servants and placed me in the ward of the house of
 the Chamberlain of the Butchers – me and the
 Chamberlain of the Bakers. ¹¹ We dreamt a dream on
 the same night, I and he; each of us dreamt according
 to the interpretation of his dream. ¹² And there, with
 us, was a Hebrew youth, a slave of the Chamberlain
 of the Butchers. We related it to him, and he in-

12. וְשָׁם אִתָּנוּ נֶעַר עֲבָדֵי עֶבֶר לְשָׂרֵי הַשְּׂבָחִים – And there with us was a Hebrew youth, a slave of the Chamberlain of the Butchers [or: Executioners].

Cursed are the wicked because even their favors are incomplete! The chamberlain recalled Joseph in the most disparaging terms [i.e. in terms which would by their very nature negate Joseph's worthiness of recognition and rise to power in Egyptian society. The cupbearer intended only to introduce Joseph to Pharaoh for the limited purpose of interpreting the dream and nothing more. The chamberlain feared that if Joseph achieved a position of power, he would avenge himself against the ingrate who had let two years go by before mentioning him to Pharaoh]. He called Joseph נֶעַר, a youth – ignorant and unfit for distinction; עֲבָדֵי, a Hebrew – a foreigner who does not even understand our language [and the laws of Egypt prohibit anyone holding high office unless he is fluent in seventy languages (*Nachalas Yaakov*); furthermore, the Hebrews were detested by the Egyptians. See *comm.* to 39:6 and *Ramban* to 41:36; cf. also derogatory connotation in 40:14]; עֶבֶר, a slave – and it is written in the laws of Egypt that a slave can neither be ruler nor wear the robes of a noble (*Rashi*).

[However, as we shall see, the Hand

of Providence prevailed and Pharaoh perceived exceptional greatness in Joseph. He circumvented these laws and promoted Joseph to the highest ranks of authority nevertheless – without regard to his background. See *Ramban* v. 38 s.v. הַנְּקִיטָא].

Others perceive less sinister motives in these designations.

According to *Radak*: Since Joseph attended to their needs in prison [40:4] the Chamberlain referred to him as נֶעַר [lit. youth] which is a term for attendant, regardless of age. [Cf. *Exodus* 33:11; *Moreh Nevuchim* 2:32.] He mentioned that Joseph had been Potiphar's slave for identification purposes, since Joseph had been well known in that role.

Haamek Davar similarly suggests that the implication of these designations was that the person whom the cupbearer was about to recommend to Pharaoh was certainly Divinely inspired in interpreting dreams inasmuch as he was but a נֶעַר, youth, who had no formal education in such matters; עֲבָדֵי, a Hebrew, and as such did not use witchcraft; עֶבֶר, a slave, and as such was certainly untutored [*Abarbanel* and *Ralbag* interpret similarly].

These commentators emphasize that the cupbearer purposely used these derogatory terms so Pharaoh would not suspect that the cupbearer had an ulterior motive in

וַיִּפְתֹּר-לָנוּ אֶת-חֲלֻמֹּתֵינוּ אִישׁ כְּחֻלְמוֹ
 פָּתַר: וַיְהִי כִּאֲשֶׁר פָּתַר-לָנוּ כֵּן הָיָה אֵתֵי
 הַשִּׁיב עַל-בְּנֵי וְאֹתוֹ תָּלָה: וַיִּשְׁלַח פְּרָעָה
 וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-יֹוסֵף וַיְרִיצֵהוּ מִן-הַבּוֹר
 וַיַּגְלֵחַ וַיַּחְלֶף שְׂמֻלָּתוֹ וַיָּבֵא אֶל-פְּרָעָה:

מִן
 מֵא/יג-יד

recommending a man who, if he succeeded in interpreting Pharaoh's dream, could rise to prominence.

Rashi rejects the interpretation that the cupbearer meant well, because, by stigmatizing Joseph as a slave, the cupbearer doomed him to insignificance since, as Rashi notes, it was contrary to Egyptian law for a slave to rise to power (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*).

Oznaim l'Torah similarly observes that since these words were uttered by a wicked man the terms could not be interpreted favorably since it is an established axiom that the favors of the wicked are incomplete.

וַיִּפְתֹּר-לָנוּ אֶת-חֲלֻמֹּתֵינוּ — And he interpreted our dreams for us.

These were different dreams and his interpretations drew the proper distinction between them (Ramban).

וַיִּפְתֹּר-לָנוּ אִישׁ כְּחֻלְמוֹ פָּתַר — He interpreted for each in accordance with his dream [lit. man, according to his dream, did he interpret].

— In accordance with the dream and consistent with its contents (Rashi; Berachos 55b — see next verse); — as it was destined to befall each of us (Ramban).

— He allowed no facet of the dream to go uninterpreted (*Haamek Davar*).

13. כִּאֲשֶׁר פָּתַר לָנוּ כֵּן הָיָה — Just as he interpreted for us so did it happen.^[1]

I.e., he perceived the truth of the dreams, and as he interpreted each one, so it befell us. Cf. the expression: every man according to his blessing he blessed him [49:28] — according to the blessing destined to befall him; he did not bless all with a common blessing, but gave each a unique one (Ramban).

אֵתֵי הַשִּׁיב עַל בְּנֵי וְאֹתוֹ תָּלָה — Me he restored to my post and him he hanged.

The unnamed subject of the verbs, restored and hanged, clearly is Pharaoh, the primary subject of this entire episode beginning with v. 10: Pharaoh once became incensed at his servants. The passage does not say who restored him since it was obviously the one with the power to do so — Pharaoh. This is

1. The Talmud [Berachos 55b] derives from this passage that: כָּל הַחֲלוּמוֹת הוֹלְכִין אַחֲרֵי הֶפֶץ (= הפֶּחִיזוֹן עֵינֵי יְרוּשָׁה מְעֻשְׂרֵי שְׁנֵי יָדָיו), the outcome of every dream depends on its interpretation (lit. mouth) — i.e., the interpretation determines its meaning. However, Rava cautioned, the interpretation must conform with the dream, as it is written [v. 12] he interpreted for each in accordance with his dream. [Cf. footnote to v. 8; Akeidah 829; Ein Yaakov; Yafeh Toar 89:8; footnote to 37:8; Ibn Ezra to 40:8.]

In this connection, the Talmud (ibid.) mentions that there were twenty-four interpreters of dreams in Jerusalem. One Sage recorded that he once had a dream and he went to consult them all, but each interpretation differed from all the others. Nevertheless all the interpretations were fulfilled.

Maharsha explains that the understanding of this esoteric concept — that one's speech can affect the outcome of a dream — lies in the cosmic influence our Sages attribute to speech: in blessings and curses, prayers and blessings, and in such concepts as the casting of a 'good' or

terpreted our dreams for us; he interpreted for each in accordance with his dream. ¹³ And it was that just as he interpreted for us so did it happen: me he restored to my post and him he hanged."

¹⁴ So Pharaoh sent and summoned Joseph, and he was rushed from the dungeon. He shaved and changed his clothes, and he came to Pharaoh. ¹⁵ And

the case with all elliptic passages which omit the obvious subjects of the verb (*Rashi*).

It is proper etiquette to address royalty in third person (*Abarbanel*).

Ibn Ezra [the *Zohar* interprets similarly] adds that following the Talmudic dictum [see footnote] that the outcome of every dream depends on its interpretation [a concept he discusses in 40:8], the subject of this passage is *Joseph* — the implicit subject of the immediately preceding passages. By his positive interpretation of the dream, he [*Joseph*], in effect, restored the one to his post and caused the other to be hanged.

14. וישלח פרעה ויקרא את־יוסף — So [lit. and] Pharaoh sent and summoned [lit. called] Joseph.

According to the traditional chronology [see *Rosh Hashanah* 10b] Joseph was released from prison on Rosh Hashanah [in the year 2230 from Creation].

In *Torah Anthology*, R' Aryeh Kaplan [note 21] calculates accordingly that 'the King of Egypt in the time of Joseph was most probably Amenhotep I of the eighteenth dynasty who ruled 1545-1525 B.C.E.' [2217-2237 from Creation].

'evil' eye. [Cf. also the Rabbinic dictum (*Moed Katan* 18a; see comm. to 2:6) ברית ברוקה: לשפתים, a covenant has been made with the lips, i.e., the spoken word, even if unintentional, may contain a portent for the future, and often becomes fulfilled as if by prophecy.]

Accordingly, the Sages caution [*Berachos* 56b] that since the effect of a dream is dependent upon its interpretation, it is important to think of an auspicious verse in conjunction with the symbolism of the dream — and generally seek a favorable interpretation — before one with a less favorable meaning comes to mind.

The Midrash records that a woman once told R' Eliezer, 'I dreamed that the upper chamber

נִירְצָהוּ מִן הַבּוֹר — And he was rushed [lit. and they made him run] from the dungeon [lit. pit].

He was rushed — in the manner of every case of Divine salvation which comes hastily and unexpectedly. Similarly, the coming of the Messiah will be sudden and hasty [see *Malachi* 3:1] (*Sforno*).

— Every Providential act which leads to the miraculous rescue of the downtrodden comes by surprise at the moment one least expects it, בְּהֶסֶח הַדַּעַת, in a moment of inattention [*Sanhedrin* 97a] (*R' Munk*).

The term בּוֹר [pit] refers to the prison which was made like a hole [dungeon]. Throughout Scripture, the term בּוֹר similarly signifies hole, whether or not it contains water (*Rashi*).

וַיַּגְלַח וַיַּחֲלַף שְׂמָלָתוֹ — [And] he shaved and changed his clothes.

— Out of respect for royalty (*Rashi*; *Midrash*).

Rashi wishes to clarify that Joseph did not shave and change his clothes to celebrate his release, for Joseph did not yet know whether he was indeed freed permanently; it was rather specifically out of respect for the king (*Mizrachi* et al).

Sforno cites *Esther* 4:2: it was forbidden to enter the King's gate clothed with sackcloth.

מִקֵּץ שְׁנֵי טו וַיֹּאמֶר פֶּרְעָה אֶל-יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם חֲלַמְתִּי
 וּפְתָר אֵין אֵתוֹ וְאֲנִי שֹׁמֵעַתִּי עֲלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר
 טו תִּשְׁמַע חֲלוֹם לִפְתָר אֵתוֹ: וַיַּעַן יוֹסֵף אֶת-
 פֶּרְעָה לֵאמֹר בִּלְעָדִי אֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶה אֶת-
 יי שְׁלוֹם פֶּרְעָה: וַיִּדְבֹּר פֶּרְעָה אֶל-יוֹסֵף

15. Pharaoh relates his dream to Joseph.

חֲלוֹם חֲלַמְתִּי וּפְתָר אֵין אֵתוֹ — *I dreamt a dream, but no one can interpret it.*

— There were interpreters, but none who could do the dream justice (*Or HaChaim*). [Cf 40:8.]

וְאֲנִי שֹׁמֵעַתִּי עֲלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר — *Now I heard it said of you [lit. and I heard about you saying].*

The *אֲנִי*, *I*, is emphatic, the implication being: *I*, the King of Egypt — to whom no one would dare lie — have heard about your talent in interpreting dreams. Therefore you need not go through the motions of modestly denying it; time is of the essence. Hear me out and interpret my dream (*Chumash R' Peninim*).

וְתִשְׁמַע חֲלוֹם לִפְתָר אֵתוֹ — *[That] you comprehend [lit. hear] a dream to interpret it.*

I.e., that you hear — listen and understand — a dream to interpret it. The verb שמע [hear] refers both to comprehension and listening. Cf. 42:23 שוֹמֵעַ יוֹסֵף, Joseph understood; Deut. 28:49: A people whose

language you shall not understand [תשמע] (Rashi).

Cf. Deut. 6:7 שמע ישראל, hear — i.e. comprehend — O Israel. King Belshazzar similarly told Daniel [Dan. 5:16]: I have heard about you that you are able to interpret interpretations and to loosen knots (R' Bachya).

— I am informed that you listen to a dream so well that you decipher it from its very context. Finding solutions depends on listening properly. Of ten people who listen to a speech or a story, each one may hear it differently and only one correctly (*R' Hirsch*).

16. בִּלְעָדִי — *[That is] beyond me [lit. without me (Ibn Janach); see 14:24].*

— The wisdom [to interpret dreams] is not my own (*Rashi*) ...

Rashi thus perceives the word to be a combination of *בִּלְ*, *not*, *עָדִי*, *unto me* — *i.e., the power is not my own. It does not mean: Not I — i.e., I refuse to interpret it, for Joseph does proceed to interpret the dream for Pharaoh. The intent is that Joseph humbly gave credit to Whom credit was due, and acknowledged that the powers ascribed to him were not his own. Cf. comm. to 40:8 (Mizrachi; Tzeidah laDerech).*

in the second story of my house was split open.'

'This indicates that you will conceive and bear a son,' R' Eliezer assured her.

She left, and so it happened.

She had the same dream again at some later date. R' Eliezer repeated the interpretation and again it was fulfilled.

Some time later, she had the same dream a third time. Again she went to R' Eliezer but he was away. So she related the dream to his disciples who interpreted it to mean that she would bury her husband.

And this is exactly what occurred.

When R' Eliezer returned and heard her cries of grief, he inquired what had happened. They told him about her dream and their interpretation, and R' Eliezer sternly rebuked them, 'You have killed a man! The Torah explicitly intimates [in our verse] that dreams follow the mouth of the interpreter!'

41 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I dreamt a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I heard it said of you that you comprehend a dream to interpret it."

¹⁶ Joseph answered Pharaoh saying, "That is beyond me. It is God Who will respond with Pharaoh's welfare."

¹⁷ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream,

אלהים יענה את שלום פרעה — It is God Who will respond with Pharaoh's welfare.

— I.e., it is God Who will place in my mouth an answer that will be for Pharaoh's welfare (*Rashi*).

Ralbag interprets this as a prayer: 'It is not my prerogative to interpret a dream as I wish, but as I am inspired from Heaven.' Accordingly, Joseph prayed: *May God respond with an interpretation favorable to Pharaoh.*

Because Joseph did not claim greatness himself and attributed whatever wisdom he had to God, the Sages in *Midrash Tanchuma* maintain that he was rewarded by rising to greatness and sovereignty.

Daniel similarly ascribed his powers to God when he was about to interpret

Nebuchadnezzar's dream [*Daniel* 2:30]: This secret was revealed to me not because I possess more wisdom than any other being, but rather to make the interpretation known to the king. Daniel was rewarded by being clothed in purple, with a gold chain around his neck, and it was proclaimed about him that he would rule one third of the kingdom [*ibid.* 5:30].

Concerning such men Scripture writes [*I Samuel* 2:30]: Those that honor Me I will honor (*Midrash HaGadol*).

According to *Ibn Ezra* the word יענה [*respond*] has the connotation of provide [מקנה] him with the joy of his heart. *Ibn Janach* interprets it as referring to Providence, while *Radak* maintains that the literal interpretation *respond* connotes in this context the granting of His beneficence as if in response to prayer.

17-24. Pharaoh's recapitulation of his dream.

A comparison of Pharaoh's account of the dream in the following verses with the Torah's narrative of it in verses 1-8 yields astonishing variations, omissions and additions. This parallel representation is graphically portrayed on the chart on the following pages: "Pharaoh's Dream: Variations and nuances."

The commentators approach these nuances in different ways:

Radak and *Ramban* do not elicit any special significance to these changes. Consistent with his commentary to the nuances in *Eliezer's* account to *Laban* in chapt. 24, *Radak* maintains that 'in reported speech a person always varies his wording — adding or subtracting as he sees fit, but always preserving the essential content ... It is useless to look for any special reason for Pharaoh's omissions and additions; these are characteristic of any repetition or paraphrase; the words change but not the content.'

See also *Ibn Ezra* to *Exodus* 20:1 for a similar interpretation.

Along similar lines, *Ramban* [to v. 3] suggests that both accounts might really have been identical, but that the Torah may not have been concerned with matching all the details.

Midrash Tanchuma, *Zohar*, and many of the later commentators however, e.g. *Kli Yakar*, *Paaneach Raza*, *HaKsav V'HaKabbalah*, *Haamek Davar*, *R' Hirsch*, perceive great significance in the subtle variations, additions and omissions. This is

especially so since the Torah usually economizes on its every word, and could have avoided the repetition entirely unless the differences were intentional.

As *Haamek Davar* observes, 'The Torah did not have to make any changes in the account, but could simply have said, *Then Pharaoh told Joseph his dream*. The fact that the Torah did not do so indicates that there are details which were not explained earlier, for special significance must be attached to every variation in the wording, and these we shall duly explain.'

In general, the commentators who attribute significance to the variations maintain either that Pharaoh did not grasp the implication of the symbolisms and therefore did not always lay due emphasis upon the essential key points of the dream when reporting it to Joseph, or that Pharaoh purposely disguised these essential points to *test Joseph's veracity*. Joseph passed the test; he was undaunted by Pharaoh's attempts and interpreted — to Pharaoh's satisfaction — the essence of the *actual* dream.

Midrash Tanchuma records that each time Pharaoh deliberately changed the dream to confuse and test Joseph, Joseph would correct him saying, 'That is not what you dreamed.' Pharaoh was amazed and asked 'Were you eavesdropping on my dreams?'

According to the latter interpretations, Joseph's remark in v. 32: וְעַל הַשְּׁנוֹת הַהֵלֹם (and upon the alterations of the dream, as well as the repetition of the vision. Both were indicative that *the matter stands ready before God and God is hastening to accomplish it* [v. 32]. (See *Paaneach Raza*; *HaKsav V'HaKabbalah*).

The various perceptions of these nuances will be treated in the commentary to the subsequent verses.

PHARAOH'S DREAM / Variations and Nuances		
JOSEPH'S REITERATION (verses 26–27)	PHARAOH'S ACCOUNT (verses 17–24)	THE SCRIPTURAL NARRATIVE (verses 1–8)
שבע פרות seven cows	... בחלמי In my dream, והנה עמד על שפת היאר behold! I was standing by the bank of the River— והנה מן היאר עלת שבע פרות when behold! out of the River there emerged— seven cows,	... וסרעה חלם And Pharaoh dreamt והנה עמד על היאר and behold! he was standing by the River— והנה מן היאר עלת שבע פרות when behold! out of the River there emerged seven cows,
הטוב the good ones	בריאות בשר ויפת תאר physically healthy and beautiful of form, והרעינו באחו and they grazed in the marshland.	יפות מראה ובריאות בשר beautiful of appearance and physically healthy, והרעינו באחו and they grazed in the marshland.
ושבע הפרות and the seven cows	והנה שבע פרות אחרות עלות אחריהן Then behold! seven other cows emerged after them	והנה שבע פרות אחרות עלות אחריהן Then behold! seven other cows emerged after them
הקנות והרעב emaciated and inferior	דלוח scrawny, ונקבות תאר מאר and of very inferior form ונקבות בשר and of emaciated flesh.	מן היאר out of the River, רעות מראה inferior of appearance ונקבות בשר and of lean flesh;

מקץ מא/יח"ט
 בַּחֲלֹמִי הִנֵּנִי עֹמֵד עַל-שֵׁפֶת הַיָּאֵר: וְהִנֵּה
 מִן-הַיָּאֵר עֹלָת שֶׁבַע פְּרוֹת בְּרִיאוֹת בָּשָׂר
 י וִפֶת תֹּאֵר וְתַרְעִינָה בְּאָחוּ: וְהִנֵּה שֶׁבַע
 פְּרוֹת אַחֲרוֹת עֹלֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן דָּלוֹת
 וְרַעוֹת תֹּאֵר מְאֹד וְרַקּוֹת בָּשָׂר לֹא-
 רָאִיתִי כִּהְנֶה בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְרַע:

JOSEPH'S REITERATION	PHARAOH'S ACCOUNT	THE SCRIPTURAL NARRATIVE
	אָמַר אֶל הַחֲרָטְמִים And I said (this) to the necromancers—	וַיְהִי בִבְקֹר וַחֲפֹצִים רִחוּוֹ נִשְׁלַח וַיִּקְרָא אֹתָם כָּל חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם הָאֵל כָּל חֲכָמָיו וַיִּסְפֹּר פִּרְעֹה לָהֶם אֶת חֲלֹמוֹ And it was in the morning: his spirit was agitated, so he sent and summoned all the necromancers of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh related his dream to them—
	וְאֵין מִגִּיד לִי but no one could explain [it] to me.	וְאֵין פֹּהֵר אוֹתָם לִפְרֹעָה but none could interpret them for Pharaoh.

17. בַּחֲלֹמִי הִנֵּנִי עֹמֵד עַל-שֵׁפֶת הַיָּאֵר —
In my dream, behold! I was standing on the bank of the River.

Since the Nile was venerated as a god of Egypt (see *comm.* to v. 1), Pharaoh delicately avoided mention that he stood *on the river*, which would connote a feeling of superiority over his god. Instead he said that he stood *on the bank of the River* (Kli Yakar).

18. בְּרִיאוֹת בָּשָׂר וִפֶת תֹּאֵר —
Robust [lit. healthy of flesh] and handsome [lit. beautiful of form].

In his dream these terms are in the reverse order (v. 2), indicating that his initial perception of them was in that order. Furthermore, v. 2 used the expression *נִפְתָּ מְרֹאָה*, lit. *beautiful of appearance*. Radak maintains that such minor reversals of order and detail are insignificant as long as the essence of the description remains unchanged.

Haamek Davar, however, notes a

significance even in this seemingly minor change of detail. The initial account of the dream (v. 2) first described the cows as *נִפְתָּ מְרֹאָה*, *beautiful of appearance*, a characteristic which refers to the healthy, attractive sheen of their hide. Then they were described as *בְּרִיאוֹת בָּשָׂר*, lit. *healthy of flesh* [i.e., *robust*]. The implication is that their attractive external appearance is emphasized. This indicated that during the good years, Egypt would be a center of commerce that would be a magnet to other nations. In our verse, however, the emphasis is on the *בָּשָׂר*, *flesh*. In this context, *וִפֶת תֹּאֵר*, literally *beautiful of form*, means that the animals looked *extremely* fat and meaty, like pregnant cows. This was to indicate that Egypt would supply sustenance to other countries — like a pregnant cow that would give birth and nurse its young. Cf. Kli Yakar who infers from Pharaoh's use of these two terms — and the order in which he reported them — that he wished to emphasize to Joseph that the health and beauty of the cows was a gift of the god Nile from which

41 behold! I was standing upon the bank of the River.
18-19 ¹⁸ When out of the River there emerged seven cows, robust and handsome, and they were grazing in the marshland. ¹⁹ Suddenly, seven other cows emerged after them — scrawny and of very inferior form and of emaciated flesh; I have never seen inferiority like

they emerged. That the animals were **בְּרִיאוֹת בָּשָׂר**, robust [lit. healthy of flesh], and fat could be taken as a natural consequence of their well-watered, fertile habitat; any animal could be expected to be well fed and robust if it grew up in a land of abundance. But these cows had a further characteristic — they were **יָפֶת תָּאֵר**, handsome of form, and with beautifully formed features. That sort of beauty is God-given; water and pasture land cannot affect an animal's features. The presence of even this second characteristic showed that the "divine" Nile was responsible.

19-21. R' Hirsch infers from Pharaoh's elaborate description of the bad cows that they made a far stronger impression on him than did the good ones. He stresses bad qualities in order to emphasize the impression they made on him.

19. שֶׁבַע-פָּרוֹת אַחֲרוֹת עוֹלוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן. — Seven other cows emerged [lit. went up] after them.

In repeating the dream, Pharaoh fails to mention that the emaciated cows emerged **מִן הַיָּאֹר**, from the River (see v. 3). This was because the Nile, as noted, was venerated as a god, and Pharaoh delicately wished to avoid the connotation that something ugly and auguring misfortune could emanate from the gods (Kli Yakar; Akeidah; Bereishis Rabbosi).

נָלוֹת וְרָעוֹת תָּאֵר מְאֹד — Scrawny, and of very inferior [lit. bad] form.

Pharaoh added that they were **נָלוֹת**, scrawny; and he substituted

רָעוֹת תָּאֵר מְאֹד, of very inferior form, for **רָעוֹת מְרָאָה**, of inferior appearance. According to Ibn Ezra, the implication of both terms is generally the same, while according to the Midrash, as mentioned in the Prefatory Comment above, this was yet another illustration of how Pharaoh deliberately changed the dream to test Joseph, but in every case — much to Pharaoh's astonishment — Joseph brought the discrepancy to his attention.

The translation *scrawny* follows Rashi who explains **נָלוֹת** as lean, citing II Samuel 13:4: *Why are you becoming lean?*

R' Hirsch relates **נָל** to its meaning of poor — hence needy, miserable.

וְנָקוֹת בָּשָׂר — And of emaciated flesh.

Throughout Scripture the term **נָקוֹת** means lacking flesh (Rashi).

That is, the word **נָקוֹת** [but; only] from the root **נָקַח** always denotes a limitation. — Hence whenever, the term **נָקוֹת** occurs in Scripture it contextually means: *limited in flesh*. It is thus to be distinguished from the words **רֵיקוֹת** and **רֵיקָה** which means empty (Mizrachi; Gur Aryeh).

[See comm. to **נָקוֹת** in v. 27.]

They were so emaciated that they had absolutely no flesh between their skin and bones, in contrast to the fat cows that were so full they appeared to be pregnant (Haamek Davar).

When Pharaoh described these cows as **נָקוֹת בָּשָׂר**, of emaciated flesh, Joseph interjected 'you did not see them so, but **נָקוֹת בָּשָׂר**, gaunt [of lean flesh]' (Tanchuma).

לֹא רָאִיתִי כְהֵנָּה בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְרַע — I have never seen inferiority like theirs in all the land of Egypt.

מקץ מא/כ"ד כ ותאכלנה הפרות הרקות והרעות את שבע הפרות הראשונות הבריאות: כא ותבאנה אל-קרפנה ולא נודע כי-באו אל-קרפנה ומראיהן רע כאשר בתחלה כב ואיקץ: וארא בחלמי והנה | שבע שבלים עלת בקנה אחר מלאת וטבות: כג והנה שבע שבלים צנמות דקות שדפות כד קרים צמחות אחריהם: ותבלען.

This phrase does not occur in the original account of the dream in v. 3.

[In the most literal sense, it would have been out of context for the Torah to interrupt a report of the dream with Pharaoh's personal impression that he had never before seen such inferior cows. (Comp. *Rashbam* to v. 21 s.v. ומראיהן.)] Accordingly, *Kli Yakar* suggests that Pharaoh purposely added this fact for a specific reason: Sometimes dreams are the product of what one has seen or fantasized during the day. Pharaoh wanted to emphasize that the inferior cows of his dream were not merely the product of his imagination, for he had never before seen such inferior cows.

Furthermore, it is noted that Pharaoh omitted in this account that *these cows stood next to the cows on the bank of the river* [see *comm.* above, v. 2].

20. ותאכלנה הפרות הרקות והרעות את שבע הפרות הראשונות הבריאות — *And the emaciated and inferior cows ate up the first seven healthy cows.*

Joseph perceived this as a sign that surplus food from the seven abundant years would nourish the Egyptians during the seven years of

famine, and that accordingly, they should set aside a reserve for those years (*Ramban* v. 4).

21. ותבאנה אל קרפנה — *Thus, they came inside them.*

— I.e. the fat cows entered the bodies of the emaciated cows. The phrase suggests that they were swallowed whole (*Sechel Tov*).

— ולא נודע כי-באו אל-קרפנה [lit. and it was not known] that they had come inside them.

I.e. it remained unrecognizable that they consumed them ...

— ומראיהן רע כאשר בתחלה *For their appearance remained as inferior as at first.*

Their appearance — i.e., the appearance of each of them. This explains why the adjective רע, inferior, is in the singular (*Ibn Ezra*).

This observation is not mentioned in the earlier account of the dream (see v. 4). Pharaoh added it now because he realized while reporting the dream that he had not noticed any difference in the emaciated cows. In the original narrative of the dream, however, it would have been inappropriate for the Torah to embellish the facts with Pharaoh's personal impressions (*Rashbam*).

- 41 theirs in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ And the emaciated
20-23 and inferior cows ate up the first seven healthy cows.
²¹ Thus they came inside them. But it was not ap-
parent that they had come inside them, for their ap-
pearance remained as inferior as at first. Then I
awoke. ²² I then saw in my dream: Behold! seven ears
of grain were sprouting on a single stalk — full and
good. ²³ And suddenly! seven ears of grain, withered,
thin and scorched by the east wind were growing

[See comm. of Ramban cited in v.
31 below.]

22. וַיֵּרָא בְחֶלְמִי — I then saw in my
dream.

וַהֲנִה שִׁבְעַת שְׂבִלִים עֹלֹת בְּקֶנָה אֶחָד —
Behold — seven ears of grain were
sprouting [lit. going up] on a
single stalk.

מְלֵאָה וטֹבוֹת — Full and good.

Full — i.e., full of kernels
(*Ralbag*).

In verse 5 the expression used is
בריאות וטֹבוֹת, *healthy and good*. *Ibn*
Ezra (ad. loc.) comments that regarding
plant life the terms *full* and *healthy* are
synonymous. *Avi Ezer* maintains,
however, that there is a distinction
between the terms: *healthy* implies that
something is free of insect ravages,
while *full* means full of kernels. Since in
Hebrew the term *healthy*, *בריא*, is not
commonly used of non-humans, *Ibn*
Ezra is merely observing that it is a bor-
rowed term to denote fullness.

According to *Haamek Davar*, the
connotation of *fullness* is that there
would be grain enough even to export
from Egypt, while the term *healthy* sug-
gests that the grain would last a long
time.

23. וַהֲנִה שִׁבְעַת שְׂבִלִים צָמֻחֹת דְּקוֹת. —
And suddenly! seven
ears of grain, withered, thin, [and]
scorched by the east wind.

The translation of צָמֻחֹת as
withered follows *Rashi* who ex-

plains that the word is related to the
cognate Aramaic term צוֹנָקָא, *stone*.
Accordingly, in our passage these
ears lacked moisture and became as
hard as wood or stone. [Some ver-
sions of *Rashi* read: and as dry as
stone.]

Rashi also cites *Onkelos* who renders: וְצִנְיָן
לָקִין, whose blossoms were stricken — i.e.,
they were void of everything but their
[withered] blossoms, for they were emptied
of their grain.

Thus *Rashi* is of the opinion that *Onkelos*
takes צָמֻחֹת in the sense of *empty*, while in
his own opinion it means *hard* (*Be'er*
Yitzchak).

On linguistic grounds, *Ramban* denies
that this has anything to do with the blos-
soms. Citing the Talmudic use of the word
צוֹנָקָא in *Berachos* 39a, he maintains that
צָמֻחֹת essentially means *separated* [frag-
mented; (*Rashi* there interprets the word as
'dry' consistent with his commentary here)].
The interpretation according to *Onkelos*' use
of the term צִנְיָן is accordingly: *cut; deficient*.

Essentially, *Ramban* explains that
there were portions on the ears void of
kernels while higher up on the stalks
the ears were scorched and entirely
empty.

In interpreting the dream [v. 27], *Joseph*
did not repeat this term, because he knew
that Pharaoh had added it merely to test him
and it was not part of his actual dream (*Sifsei*
Chachomim). As the *Midrash* notes: *Joseph*
said, 'It is not צָמֻחֹת, withered ones, that you
saw, but דְּקוֹת, thin ones.' According to
Ramban, however, in *Joseph's* interpretation
[v. 27] he substituted it with the word נֶקוּחַ
which *Ramban* interprets as *empty* [but
which *Rashi*, consistent with his interpreta-
tion in v. 19, interprets as *lean*]. See comm. to
v. 27.

השָׁבִלִים הִדְקָת אֶת שֶׁבַע הַשָּׁבִלִים
הַטְּבוֹת וְאָמַר אֶל-הַחֲרָטְמִים וְאִין מְגִיד
לִי: וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-פָּרְעָה חֲלוֹם פָּרְעָה
אֶחָד הוּא אֶת אֲשֶׁר הָאֱלֹהִים עֲשָׂה הַגִּיד
כִּי לַפָּרְעָה: שֶׁבַע פָּרֶת הַטְּבֹת שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים
הֵנָּה וְשֶׁבַע הַשָּׁבִלִים הַטְּבֹת שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים
כִּי הֵנָּה חֲלוֹם אֶחָד הוּא: וְשֶׁבַע הַפָּרוֹת
הַרְקוֹת וְהָרַעַת הָעֵלֶת אַחֲרֵיהֶן שֶׁבַע
שָׁנִים הֵנָּה וְשֶׁבַע הַשָּׁבִלִים הַרְקוֹת

24. ותבלען ... את שבע השבלים
הטבות — *Then [lit. and] the thin
ears of grain swallowed up the
seven good ears.*

[In v. 7 the adjectives are the
Hebrew *healthy and full*.]

— ואמר אל-החרטמים ואין מגיד לי
— *[And] I said this to the necromancers
(see v. 8) but no one could explain
[lit. tell] it to me.*

Pharaoh did not mention that he
had summoned the *wise men* as
well. Pharaoh had apparently not
been so astonished that the wise
men — who rely on logic — could
not fathom the inner symbolisms of
his dream. He was dismayed, rather,
that the necromancers — who could
use 'magic' to decipher the dream —
were also unable to interpret it
(*Haamek Davar*).

[Furthermore, Pharaoh apparently
finds it beneath his dignity to
mention that when he awoke (v. 8):
וַתִּפְּצֵם רִחוֹ, *his spirit was agitated*.]

25. Joseph's interpretation.

חֲלוֹם פָּרְעָה אֶחָד הוּא — *The dream of
Pharaoh is a single one.*

Both dreams complement each
other: they are two components of a
cogent whole. The cows represent
plowing, and the ears of grain
represent reaping (*Abarbanel*).

— אֶת אֲשֶׁר הָאֱלֹהִים עֲשָׂה הַגִּיד לַפָּרְעָה
— *What God is about to do [lit. that
which God does] He has told
to Pharaoh.*

— This has been revealed to
Pharaoh because only he can take
the necessary measures to deal with
the situation (*Rashbam*).

Because the dream concerns mat-
ters of State, God sent it directly to
Pharaoh. God wished to com-
municate with Pharaoh only
through His *own* agent who can
translate the Divine language clear-
ly; that is why Pharaoh's wizards
cannot interpret the dream (*Al-
shich*).^[1]

Cf. the Talmudic dictum [*Berachos*

1. Joseph placed heavy emphasis on the fact that God was communicating His intentions directly to Pharaoh; not only did Joseph make the point in this verse, he repeated it in v. 28. There were two reasons for this insistence: The dreams occurred on the night of Rosh Hashanah [*Rosh Hashanah* 10b; see *comm.* to v. 14], a time when dreams are particularly auspicious since a country's destiny, including its fertility and drought, are decided then. [Cf. *Ein Yaakov* ad. loc.] Furthermore, the dreams were communicated to the ruler of the nation. R' Yitzchak teaches that the more prominent a person, the more significant a revelation

41 after them. ²⁴ Then the thin ears of grain swallowed
24-27 up the seven good ears. I said this to the necroman-
 cers, but no one could explain it to me."

²⁵ Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dream of Pharaoh
 is a single one. What God is about to do, He has told
 to Pharaoh: ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years,
 and the good ears are seven years. it is one dream.
²⁷ Now, the seven emaciated and bad cows who
 emerged after them are seven years as are the seven
 emaciated ears scorched by the east wind. There shall

55a]: 'There are three things which the Holy One Blessed be He, proclaims Himself, namely: famine, plenty, and a good provider' [Scriptural verses are cited for each]. Or HaChaim comments that all three proclamations were inherent in Joseph's interpretation: The famine in v. 27; the plenty in v. 29; and the good provider in verses 33-34.

In referring to the case of the seven good years, Joseph used the expression God 'has told [הגיד] to Pharaoh,' since it alluded to a period that was near at hand; but with reference to the famine he said [v. 28], 'what God is about to do He has shown [הראה] to Pharaoh,' because that was to take place in the distant future and show is a more appropriate term in such a case (Rashi).

26. שבע פרות הטבת שבע שנים
 הנה ושבע השקלים הטבת שבע שנים
 הנה — The seven good cows are
 seven years and the good ears are
 seven years.

I.e., they represent the same seven years [not a total of fourteen]. — This is the implication in this verse of אחר הוא, it is one dream (Mizrachi)]. The reason the dream was repeated was not to suggest that there would be fourteen

years of plenty, but because the matter has been set in motion and is about to happen, as Joseph expressly told him in v. 32 (Rashi).

Joseph understood that the units referred to years [rather than months or days] because famine and abundance run in yearly cycles (B'chor Shor).

27. ושבע הפרות ... שבע שנים הנה —
 Now the seven emaciated and bad
 [i.e., ugly] cows who emerged after
 them are seven years.

ושבע השקלים הרקות שדפות הקרים —
 As are [lit. and] the seven emaciated
 ears scorched by the east wind.

According to the implication of Rashi in v. 19, the meaning of רקות throughout Scripture means emaciated while Ramban in v. 23 appears to render it empty. Onkelos translates it לקיחא, stricken.

Beer Yitzchak to v. 19, interprets Rashi to agree that the word in our verse means empty because it is vowelized רקות (from ריק, empty) rather than רקות as in v. 19. Most commentators to Rashi disagree, however, maintaining that only if the word is spelled with a yud [ריק] would Rashi render it as empty.

[To the Torah's description of the inferior ears (v. 6), Pharaoh added the ad-

granted him. Pharaoh's Rosh Hashanah dream, therefore, was vital to all of Egypt (Zohar).

In the same vein, R' Bachya cites Proverbs 21:1: Like streams of water is the king's heart in the hand of HASHEM. Knowing that God exercises such intimate control over rulers, he realized that a revelation to the king of the world's greatest power was important to the entire nation. Coming on the night of judgment, Rosh Hashanah, the dream could only be a revelation of God's imminent intentions.

מקץ כח שרפות הקדרים יהיו שבע שני רעב: הוא
 מא/כח-לא הדבר אשר דברתי אל-פרעה אשר
 כט האלהים עשה הראה את-פרעה: הנה
 שבע שנים באות שבע גדול בכל-ארץ
 5 מצרים: וקמו שבע שני רעב אחריהן
 ונשכח כל-השבע בארץ מצרים וכלה
 לא הרעב את-הארץ: ולא-ינדע השבע

jective צננות, *shriveled*. Reacting to Pharaoh's obvious emphasis on their inferiority, Joseph referred to them by the even stronger term רקות, *emaciated* [or *empty*].

יהיו שבע שני רעב — *There shall be seven years of famine.*

Although the dream began with visions of the seven years of abundance, Joseph began his interpretation with the prediction of the famine because only thereby could he attract Pharaoh's serious attention. Egypt was such a fertile, wealthy country — Scripture (13:10) calls it a *garden of HASHEM* — that prosperity was taken for granted. Even the seven years of abundance was not considered conclusive proof of Joseph's wisdom; accordingly, only when the famine arrived do we read [v. 54]: 'The seven years of famine began approaching just as Joseph had foretold,' for the truth of Joseph's prediction was not realized until the famine began. By singling out the famine, Joseph made the point that God had forewarned Pharaoh of impending disaster to assure the country's survival (*Ramban*).

Furthermore, he mentioned the famine first because knowledge of the abundance was necessary only because it made it possible to plan for the following famine (*Or HaChaim*).

— הוא הקבר ... הראה את-פרעה 28. *It is the matter that I have spoken to Pharaoh: What God is about to do He has shown to Pharaoh.*

Thereby allowing the king to make provisions for saving his subjects in the future (*Sforno*).

[On the use here of *shown* instead of *told* see *comm.* to v. 25.]

29. [Having outlined the general interpretation of the dream, Joseph now proceeds to interpret it in detail.]

הנה שבע שנים באות — *Behold! seven years are coming.*

הנה, *behold*, in this context denotes immediacy (*Ralbag*).

— שבע גדול בכל-ארץ מצרים — *A great abundance throughout all the land of Egypt.*

— An abundance even greater than usual. Moreover, this abundance will be throughout *all the land of Egypt* not only in the areas adjoining the Nile itself where the land is irrigated by its overflow (*Abarbanel*).

This passage implies that the abundance was only in the land of Egypt, whereas no such limitation is made regarding the famine predicted in the following verse. That the famine would extend to other lands may be indicated by Pharaoh's vision that the good cows

41 be seven years of famine. ²⁸ It is the matter that I have
28-31 spoken to Pharaoh: What God is about to do He has
 shown to Pharaoh.

²⁹ "Behold! seven years are coming — a great abundance throughout all the land of Egypt. ³⁰ Then seven years of famine will arise after them; and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. The famine will ravage the land. ³¹ And the abundance

remained in the reed grass near the river in Egypt [v. 2], whereas the inferior cows wandered away — Pharaoh knew not where — implying that the famine would spread beyond the borders of Egypt (Ramban v. 2).

30. וְקָמוּ שִׁנֵּי רָעָב אַחֲרֵיהֶן —
 Then seven years of famine will
 arise after them.

— They will 'arise' as if they had until this point been restrained involuntarily and are now coming to collect their due (Zohar).

I.e., though the good years will come [v. 29] as a friend, the seven years of famine will rise up — a term used for violence as above 4:8; Deut. 19:11 (Oz-naim l'Torah).

וְנִשְׁכַּח כְּלֵי־הַשָּׂעָב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם —
 And all the abundance in the land of
 Egypt will be forgotten.

Even healthy, strong people will become enfeebled during the famine as if there had never been abundance at all (Haamek Davar).

— That people will 'forget' the abundance is not ingratitude. Someone who is tormented by hunger forgets that he was ever satisfied (Alshich).

According to Rashi, this constituted Joseph's interpretation of the בְּלִיעָה, the 'swallowing' [of the healthy stalks by the thin stalks (v. 7).]

[In v. 4, however, Rashi writes that it was the vision of the fat cows eating the emaciated cows that inspired Joseph's interpretation in this verse. See footnote there for an explanation of why Rashi changes metaphors.]

According to Ramban [ibid.], however, Joseph's interpretation in this verse as well as the next was inspired by v. 21: But it was not apparent that they had come inside them for their appearance remained as inferior as at first.

וְנָכַל הָרָעָב אֶת־הָאָרֶץ — [And] the
 famine will ravage [lit. consume]
 the land.

— Unless previous precautions and taken (Akeidas Yitzchak).

— The whole region, not just the land of Egypt; for the famine would be universal. However, since the abundance would be limited to Egypt, other countries would be unable to store up food although they undoubtedly heard about the impending famine, since the matter was well known (Ramban v. 2).

This 'ravaging' refers to areas [even in Egypt] which will lack the foresight or ability to prepare against the famine — they will be utterly consumed. This was symbolized in the dream by the inferior stalks which were devoid of kernels (Haamek Davar).

Targum Yonasan renders: The famine will consume the inhabitants of the land [comp. v. 47].

מִקֵּץ מֵאָדָּה הָיָה הָרָעָב הַהוּא אַחֲרֵיכֶן כִּי-
 לֹב לֹב מֵאָדָּה הָיָה מֵאָדָּה: וְעַל הַשָּׁנוֹת הַחֲלוּם אֵל-
 פִּרְעָה פָּעַמִּים בִּינְכוֹן הַדָּבָר מֵעַם
 הָאֱלֹהִים וּמִמֶּהָר הָאֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ:

31. ולא ינרע השבע בארץ מפני הרעב. — And the abundance will be unknown in the land in the face of that subsequent famine — for it will be terribly severe.

I.e., the surplus that the land enjoyed will not be recognizable because of the terrible famine that will follow it.

According to Ramban [v. 4] and Rashi to our verse this constituted Joseph's interpretation of 'thus they [the fat cows] came inside them [the emaciated cows] but it was not apparent that they had come inside them' [v. 21]. The fact that the emaciated cows did not themselves become fattened even after having consumed the fat cows, indicated to Joseph that the stores of the seven abundant years would barely suffice to support life, but nothing more. [Though people would find sustenance in the famine from the hoarded abundance of the preceding seven years, they would not become 'fattened' by it — it would supply only their basic needs. This is what motivated Joseph's advice in the following verses.]

[Where Ramban and Rashi differ is that Ramban maintains that Joseph's interpretation in both this and the previous verse was inspired by v. 21, while Rashi maintains that the previous verse was based on the interpretation of the 'eating' and 'swallowing' described in verses 4 and 24 respectively.]

Haamek Davar maintains that this is an independent statement not referring to the famine: Even during the years of abundance themselves, the abundance will not be apparent, because so much

of the grain will have to be hoarded for the impending famine.

Abarbanel interprets: The [former] abundance will be unknown in the land — i.e., during the subsequent years of famine the soil will become so arid that it will be unrecognizable in the soil itself [בְּאָרֶץ] that the ground was ever fertile and abundant.

32. ועל השנות החלום אל-פרעה — פְּעָמִים — As for the repetition of the dream to Pharaoh twice.

Although the dreams were not truly identical, Joseph used the word *repetition* with reference to the identical themes of the two dreams: the cows and the ears of grain. By *twice* he refers to the fact that both dreams occurred on the same night. The repetition attested to the fact that *the matter is set and established by God*, while the fact that both dreams occurred in the same night attested to the fact that *God is hastening to make it materialize* (Ibn Ezra).

According to Ramban, however, the repeated symbolism was not intended to prove that God's plan was complete, but was an integral part of the message — the cows representing plowing and the stalks representing harvesting [see *comm.* to v. 2]. Thus, the *repetition* mentioned by Joseph is the unusual fact that these symbolisms were shown to Pharaoh in two separate dreams on the same night, instead of combining both plowing and harvesting in a single dream. That the two symbolisms were shown in separate dreams indicated both that the mat-

will be unknown in the land in the face of the subsequent famine — for it will be terribly severe.³² As for the repetition of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it is because the matter stands ready before God and God is hastening to accomplish it.

ter was determined by God and that He is rushing to make it materialize.

The observation has been made that Joseph's statement is important for the understanding of Biblical style. Repetition and parallelism indicate determination and emphasis. Comp. also such Scriptural idioms as *אכל תאכל*, you shall surely eat, *מות תמות*, you shall surely die.

[Some perceive in the word *השנות* a suggestion of Pharaoh's having constantly changed the dream to confuse Joseph and test his veracity. See Prefatory Comment to v. 17.]

כי נכון הדבר מעם האלהים — It is because the matter stands ready before [lit. from] God.

The term *נכון* in this context means prepared; ready (Rashi).

Thus it is synonymous with Exodus 19:11 *והיו נכונים*, let them be 'ready.' It is different from *נכון*, correct, in Deut. 13:15: *אמת נכון הדבר*, the matter is true and 'correct' (Mizrachi).

Onkelos renders: *It is a confirmed thing before God.*

— And accordingly it is irrevocable (Malbim).

[This apparently is based on *Berachos* 55b which cites our verse as proof that repetitive dreams are fulfilled.]

וּמִמָּהֵר הָאֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת — And God is hastening to accomplish it.⁽¹⁾

[Lit. to do it. The connotation of the verb *עשה*, do, in this context is to put something into its ultimate condition; to cause it to materialize (see Ramban to 1:7).]

Rashbam observes that although the symbolism of Joseph's own dream had also been repeated — in the form of sheaves and stars respectively [37:7, 9] — they were not dreamt on the same night. Therefore there could be a long delay before their fulfillment.

33. Joseph's plan.

The following was not mere counsel, for was Joseph asked to be Pharaoh's counselor? — Joseph dared to offer the following plan only because he perceived it to be part of the interpretation of the dream itself. As noted in the comm. to v. 4, the vision of the fat cows absorbed by the lean ones was an absolute sign to Joseph that the plenty of the abundant years would be used during the famine, indicating that food from the abundant years should be set aside for the famine.

1. According to the rules of syntax Joseph should not have repeated God's Name in this phrase; since God is the subject of the previous phrase, Joseph should have used the pronoun *He*. However, throughout these verses we see Joseph emphasizing to Pharaoh that it is God Who is the Doer and Teller [v. 25], the Shower [v. 28], and the One Who is hastening to accomplish it. Thus God is mentioned twice in this verse to accentuate the central role of Divine Providence.

Joseph achieves this proclamation of God's omnipotence in the midst of an idolatrous world not by a lecture or a discourse, but by the rhetoric device of repeating His Name.

Pharaoh responded to this device by himself proclaiming Joseph as a man in whom is the spirit of God [v. 38], and instead of describing Joseph as merely an expert as he did in v. 15, he acknowledges that 'God has informed you of all this' [v. 39].

Thus, as a result of Joseph's daring, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, defers for the first time to the supreme King of Kings (Akeidas Yitzchak; Alshich).

מִקֵּץ לֵב וְעֵתָהּ יִרְא פֶּרְעָה אִישׁ נָבוֹן וְחָכָם
מֵאֶלֶף לֶגֶלֶד לֵב וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: יַעֲשֶׂה פֶּרְעָה
וַיִּפְקֹד פְּקָדִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְחִמֵּשׁ אֶת־

Joseph felt compelled to offer this proposal in the context of the interpretation (*Ramban*).

[According to the implication of *Rashi* and others, Joseph's advice was not part of the interpretation. Rather, encouraged by the successful climate of his royal audience Joseph trusted in the Divine Presence that obviously guided his actions and ventured to offer the proposal on his own — confident of God's Protection. (Cf. footnote to v. 4 s.v. (וְחִמֵּשׁ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ).] See also *R' Munk* below s.v. אִישׁ נָבוֹן וְחָכָם.

Sforno maintains that the advice flowed naturally from the interpretation. Since God's purpose in letting Pharaoh know all this was to enable him to provide against the famine, it followed that Pharaoh should undertake the following preventative steps.

R' Avraham ben HaRambam cites his father that Joseph offered this unsolicited advice to demonstrate to Pharaoh that his interpretation was not merely the result of his own speculation, but was definitive and absolute, and therefore it was only natural that the monarch would want to implement certain procedures to forestall disaster. For as maintained by *R' Avraham HaChassid*, whom he also cites, Joseph offered the advice as an act of compassion so that *the land will not perish in the famine* [v. 36]. He was apprehensive that Pharaoh and his courtiers might otherwise not be stirred to action.

The *Zohar* states that Joseph was told the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream by prophetic inspiration and was also informed at that time that Pharaoh

would appoint a *discerning and wise man* whose plan would save the populace from starvation. Joseph therefore felt compelled to relate every facet of his prophetic vision since [as noted in *Sanhedrin* 89a] 'one who suppresses his prophecy [הַכּוֹשֵׁב אֶת נְבוּאָתוֹ] is liable to the death penalty at the hands of heaven.'

וְעֵתָהּ — *Now*.

I.e., immediately; time is a major factor in its fulfillment (*Ibn Caspi*).

וְיִרְא פֶּרְעָה — *Let Pharaoh seek out* [lit. *look*].

I.e. *choose, select*, as in 22:8: *God will seek out* [וְיִרְאָה] *for Himself the lamb for the offering, my son.* ... It is Pharaoh himself who must do this since the dream was revealed to him (*HaKsav V' HaKabbalah*).

אִישׁ נָבוֹן וְחָכָם — *A discerning* [lit. *understanding*] *and wise man*.

Discerning — who will understand how much food to leave for the needs of the people in accordance with their individual family requirements, and then sell the surplus to other countries to accumulate wealth for Pharaoh's treasury; and *wise* — in the science of preserving grain, by mixing it with salty substances and raw silver dust so it would not rot [following the advice recorded in the *Talmud*; see *Shabbos* 31a; *Machshirin* 6:1; *Rashi Shabbos* 88b; *Midrash* 90:50] (*Ramban*).¹¹

1. *Rashi*, in *Deut.* 1:13 explains *discerning* as 'one who understands one thing from another.' He cites the *Sifre* where it is recorded that: Arios asked *R' Yose*, What is the distinction between *חֲכָמִים*, *wise men*, and *נְבוֹנִים*, *discerning men*?

— A *wise man* resembles a *wealthy money-changer*. When people bring him money to consider he does so, but when they do not bring him any he merely sits and gazes.

A *discerning man* resembles an *industrious money-changer*. When people bring him money

33 "Now let Pharaoh seek out a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt. 34 Let Pharaoh proceed and let him appoint overseers on the land, and he shall prepare the land of Egypt during

Ramban further suggests that Joseph said this with himself in mind.

Surely Joseph must have viewed as providential the sudden and dramatic manner in which he was brought before Pharaoh. He still had faith in the fulfillment of his adolescent dreams [37:5-9] and felt that the long-awaited turning-point in his destiny had finally arrived. If so, he had to utilize this unique opportunity. He did so decisively by offering his unsolicited counsel. His advice was so relevant and wise that Pharaoh was enormously impressed (R' Munk).

According to Abarbanel, 'the discernment and the wisdom' of which Joseph spoke was the business acumen to buy grain cheaply without driving up prices during the prosperity and to prevent inflation during the famine.

Obviously, God showed Pharaoh the extraordinary abundance of the next seven years so that the surplus could be set aside for the famine. Unless plans were made to remove the additional food from the market, farmers, seeing bumper crops and low prices in the first year, would plant very little in the second year and so on. The result would be no surplus for the years of the famine. It would be an integral part of this scheme to encourage additional planting despite the surplus (Or HaChaim).

וְיִשְׁתָּהוּ עַל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם — And set him over the land of Egypt.

— To administer this program

throughout the entire land (Ramban).

— As the king's regent vested with his authority over all the inhabitants of the land (Akeidas Yitzchak; R' Bachya).

34. יַעֲשֶׂה פָרָעָה — Let Pharaoh proceed [lit. make; do].

Let him carry out this advice [i.e., bring it to fruition (cf. Ramban to 1:7). Or in the sense of עָשָׂה meaning acquire [grain] in Deut. 8:17 — let Pharaoh acquire through the overseers he will appoint, etc. (Ibn Ezra).

The sense is: Let Pharaoh himself be active in this matter and motivate others (Or HaChaim).

וְיִתְּקַדּוּ פְקָדִים עַל-הָאָרֶץ — And let him appoint overseers [lit. commanders; appointees] on the land.

These appointees are to act under the discerning and wise man entrusted with the overall supervision of the scheme; since that individual could not possibly carry out the task by himself (Ramban).

Onkelos renders פְּקָדִים trustworthy men.

— Men who have the confidence of the local residents, to insure harmonious collaboration (Akeidas Yitzchak).

The commentators differ over who should appoint these overseers.

R' Bachya, Alshich and Sforno explain that Pharaoh was to empower the

to consider he does so, but when they do not bring him any, he goes about soliciting and brings his own business.'

[Similarly, a wise man can grasp what is told him but cannot think a matter out for himself; a discerning man is an original thinker — not dependent upon what he has been taught him by others.]

מִקֵּץ מֵאָלָה לֹא-לֹא אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשֶׁבַע שָׁנֵי הַשָּׁבַע: וַיִּקְבְּצוּ
אֶת-כָּל-אֶכְלֵ הַשָּׁנִים הַטּוֹבוֹת הַבָּאֹת
הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּצְבְּרוּ-בָר תַּחַת יַד-פֶּרְעָה אֶכְל
בְּעָרִים וְשִׁמְרוּ: וְהָיָה הָאֶכֶל לְפָקֶדוֹן

discerning and wise man to appoint regional supervisors so his supreme authority over them would be consolidated and unquestioned. Thus, the verse is interpreted to mean: *יַעֲשֶׂה פֶרְעָה, let Pharaoh act* — i.e., grant the authority, and *let him* — i.e., the wise and discerning man, appoint overseers, etc.

Ralbag and Abarbanel suggest that although the wise and discerning man would have autonomy in administering the program, the subject of this verse is Pharaoh — let Pharaoh himself act and appoint overseers.

וְחָמַשׁ אֶת אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשֶׁבַע שָׁנֵי הַשָּׁבַע
— And he shall prepare the land of Egypt during the seven years of abundance.

The translation of *וְחָמַשׁ* as prepare follows Rashi who quotes Onkelos: וַיְהַיְוֶה [make active and ready], and cites Exodus 13:18 where *וְחָמָשִׁים* means prepared; equipped [in the contextual sense of prepared for warfare; see Rashi there]. The implication here is: and let Pharaoh 'arm' the land with provisions during the period of abundance.

According to Ibn Ezra and many commentators, the word *וְחָמַשׁ* derives from the Hebrew word *חָמֵשׁ*, five, and the verse means that Pharaoh should buy a fifth of the

land of Egypt during the seven years of abundance.

Along similar lines, Rashbam and Radak observe that this was a proposal that Pharaoh double the usual one-tenth tax on grain, and have his overseers collect a fifth of all the produce for the royal granary during that period. Joseph ultimately instituted such a concept when he purchased the land and demanded a fifth of all the produce for Pharaoh [see 47:24-26].

R' Hirsch emphasizes that it is not the overseers who are to impose this tax of twenty percent of all produce, but Pharaoh himself, and it is to be collected by the permanent tax officials. By freeing the overseers from the onerous and unpopular tasks of imposing and collecting taxes, they would be permitted to develop the harmonious relationship with the farmers that is indispensable to their tax. They could not achieve the planning of maximum harvests unless they would exert moral influence over the people, something that would be impossible if they became villainous tax collectors.^[1]

Rashi follows Onkelos' interpretation of prepare, and does not subscribe to the interpretations of a fifth because the narrative which follows mentions only the storing up

1. R' Hirsch observes that Joseph's advice to separate a fifth of the annual produce during the years of plenty for distribution in the years of famine was quite calculated to supply the basic needs of existence.

'Let us assume,' he writes, 'that in years of plenty one uses twice as much as in ordinary years, and, in contrast, in years of scarcity one makes do with half the ordinary quantity. Hence, in a year of abundance one would use four times as much as in a year of famine. If this is so, then it is quite simple that in any case, one fifth of what is produced in a year of superfluity must suffice to feed one famine year even if everything else, the remaining four fifths are completely consumed.'

41 the seven years of abundance. ³⁵ And let them gather
35-36 all the food of those approaching good years; let
 them amass fine grain under Pharaoh's authority for
 food in the cities, and safeguard it. ³⁶ The food will be
 a reserve for the land against the seven years of

of reserves (verses 48 and 49) and says nothing about acquisition of land or produce (Mizrachi).

[The verses Rashbam cites in 47:24-26 are not really parallel inasmuch as they reflect a special arrangement made later during the famine and according to Rashi, were not part of the scheme Joseph proposed here. Rashbam and the other commentators would presumably counter that there was such a program in effect during the abundance but the Torah did not specifically record it since it was already alluded to. Cf. *Karnei Or* on *Ibn Ezra*.]

Haamek Davar renders: Let the country be divided into five districts.

35. וְקָבְצוּ אֶת-כָּל-אֹכֶל הַשָּׂנִים הַטּוֹבוֹת. וְשָׁמְרוּ – וְקָבְצוּ אֶת-כָּל הַבָּאִת הַטּוֹבָה
 And let them [i.e. the overseers] gather all the food of those approaching good years.

— As a levy from the landowners. These were exacted from them even against their will (Rashbam).

All the food — i.e., whatever can be stored of the surplus crops in years of unnatural abundance (Chizkuni; Abarbanel).

According to Ramban in v. 48 below, it was literally all the food that Joseph suggested gathering. It would then be doled out to the Egyptians commensurate with their needs so they should not squander it. The balance would be hoarded for use during the famine. According to those who interpret חמש as a fifth, our verse refers only to the ingathering of the aforementioned double tithe.

Rashi makes the grammatical note that the word אֹכֶל, food, is a noun and therefore the accent is on the first syllable, the א, and it is punctuated with a *patach katan* [a name Rashi uses for our *sego*] under the כ; while the word אוֹכֵל, which is a participle, who

eats, has the accent on the last syllable, the כ, and is punctuated with a *kametz katan* [= *izeire*].

וְשָׁמְרוּ – וְשָׁמְרוּ אֶת-כָּל הַבָּאִת הַטּוֹבָה
 And let them amass fine grain under Pharaoh's authority [lit. hand] for food in the cities, and [let them] safeguard it.

As culled from the commentators, this passage is telling us that the regional overseers should store up the winnowed and sifted fine grain [from the root בָּרַר, sift] (*Ibn Ezra*); grain that could be stored without rotting (*Haamek Davar* [see Ramban to v. 48 below]; and this should be placed directly under Pharaoh's own 'hand' — i.e. under his personal control and stored in his granaries (*Rashi*). This should be done in every city: every city will have its own royal granaries where food will be collected to save transport charges and will serve to reassure the citizens that their food is not being taken for the benefit of others (*Tur*; *Ralbag*; *R' Bachya*).

And let them guard the food from harm (*Malbim*).

[See v. 48 for further elucidation of this plan and its operation.]

36. וְהָיָה הָאֹכֶל לְפָקֶדוֹן לָאָרֶץ –
 [And] the food will be a reserve for the land against [lit. for] the seven years of famine which will befall [lit. be in] the land of Egypt.

I.e., the food thus stored shall be treated like any other פָּקֶדוֹן, [deposit entrusted to another's care until required] — it shall be for the maintenance of [the inhabitants of

מִקֵּץ מֵאָה/לֹדֶט
 לְאֶרֶץ לְשֹׁבַע שְׁנֵי הָרָעָב אֲשֶׁר תִּהְיֶינָה
 בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְלֹא-תִכְרֹת הָאֶרֶץ בְּרָעָב:
 לו וְיִיטֵב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי פֶרְעָה וּבְעֵינֵי כָל-
 לה עַבְדָּיו: וַיֹּאמֶר פֶּרְעָה אֶל-עַבְדָּיו הִנֵּמְצָא
 שלישי לט כִּזָּה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר

(Onkelos)] the land against the seven years of famine which shall befall the land of Egypt (*Rashi*).

— It may not be used for any other purpose (*Ramban*).

כְּכֵן — וְלֹא-תִכְרֹת הָאֶרֶץ בְּרָעָב: — So that [lit. and] the land will not perish in the famine.

That the land would not perish [if proper steps were taken] was indicated in the dream: the lean cows, though still emaciated even after having eaten the seven fat cows, nevertheless did not die of hunger (*Ramban*).

37. The interpretation is well received.

וְיִיטֵב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי פֶרְעָה וּבְעֵינֵי כָל-
 עַבְדָּיו — The matter appeared good to Pharaoh and to all his servants.

The matter — i.e. the interpretation and Joseph's general demeanor (*Sforno*).

❖ What caused Pharaoh and his courtiers to believe Joseph's interpretation, when he did not believe that of his own wise men? Why did Pharaoh promote him to high office before the truth of his interpretation could be proven?

Many reasons are offered in the *Midrashim* and by the commentators.

1. *Abarbanel* makes the following similar observation: One who has been entrusted with an authentic dream has been given a glimpse of matters directed by Divine Providence, but in his imaginative perception this revelation was translated into pictures and symbols. Upon awakening, the dreamer will tend to remember only the empty symbols — the pictures and the parable — but he forgets the dream's significance; the object of the symbol remains hidden in the folds of his dream fantasies, just as a kernel is hidden in the husk.

As soon as the interpreter discovers the dream's true and accurate meaning, the dreamer will immediately sense that this is what he saw. This is how human memory functions, particularly where a considerable time has not elapsed since the event; as soon as someone is reminded of it, he will recall that this is what he forgot.

The interpretation pleased Pharaoh himself, *Sechel Tov* records, because Pharaoh had also dreamed of the interpretation but he had forgotten what it was. Now that he heard Joseph's words, he remembered that this was the very interpretation about which he had dreamt!¹¹¹

Sechel Tov continues that Joseph's counsel pleased Pharaoh's servants because it would save the lives of all the inhabitants of the country. This is the intent of *Proverbs* 16:7: *When a man's ways please HASHEM He makes even his enemies be at peace with him* — for even the cupbearer and the wizards admitted that Joseph was right.

Following *Midrash Tanchuma* and *Zohar*, Pharaoh had a particular reason for acknowledging Joseph's wisdom. The king had intentionally altered many details of his dream when relating it to Joseph [see Pref. comm. to v. 17], but Joseph constantly corrected Pharaoh and refused to be swayed from dealing with the true symbolisms as Pharaoh had actually dreamt them. Pharaoh was assured, therefore, that Joseph had interpreted correctly. As the *Tanchuma* notes, Pharaoh was amazed at the accuracy of Joseph's perception and asked him, 'Were you eavesdropping on my dreams?'

Additionally, as the *Midrash* notes, all of Pharaoh's wizards interpreted

41 famine which will befall the land of Egypt, so that the
37-38 land will not perish in the famine."

³⁷ The matter appeared good to Pharaoh and to all his servants. ³⁸ Pharaoh said to his servants, "Could we find another like him — a man in whom is the spirit of God?"

them as two distinct dreams, contrary to Pharaoh's understanding, but Joseph perceived both as one and interpreted them accordingly. Furthermore of them all, only Joseph perceived Pharaoh's dream as affecting the State, not Pharaoh the individual [see comm. to v. 8 s.v. וַיִּסְפֹּר].

Cf. also *Rashbam* to 40:16 who emphasizes that one knows the truth when one hears it because 'the truth speaks for itself.'

According to *Radak*: It appeared good to them because they understood that he had given good advice. They also believed his interpretation because: (a) it fit in well with the dream, and (b) because the cupbearer had already told them that just as Joseph had interpreted for them, so did it happen [v. 13], and finally (c) because Joseph did not refer it to the distant future [when its veracity could not be established until after a long delay], but predicted that its fulfillment was imminent: *Behold seven years are coming* [v. 29].

38. Joseph is appointed viceroy of Egypt.

[As noted earlier, Egyptian law specified that a slave could not be appointed to a position of aristocracy. But, because Pharaoh realized that only Joseph could properly implement and administer the master plan for national salvation, he recognized that Joseph would require a prestigious governmental post. Therefore, he sought means to make an exception to the law.]

וַיִּאְמָר פַּרְעֹה אֶל עֲבָדָיו — And Pharaoh said to his servants.

He 'consulted' with his servants because he wanted them to concede Joseph's superiority over themselves (*Abarbanel*).

וְהִנֵּמָצָא כָמוֹ — Could we find another like him.

[I.e., with his qualifications?] — If we were to go out and seek it, could we expect to find anyone like him? (*Rashi*).

We must now appoint a wise and discerning man over the land of Egypt. Now, where can we possibly find one like him? — For Joseph's wisdom far exceeds that of any of our magicians! (*Radak*).

As pointed out by *Rashi* in v. 12, there were several reasons why Egyptian law should have disqualified Joseph from rising in the governmental hierarchy of that country. *Ramban* accordingly observes that since the Hebrews were detested by the Egyptians who considered them untouchables [see comm. to 39:6 and 43:32], Pharaoh preferred not to confer quasi-royal powers upon Joseph without first ensuring the approval and consent of his advisers. Therefore he emphasized that they would find no Egyptian equally qualified for the post for the spirit of God is within him.⁽¹⁾

The translation of וַיִּנְקָצָא in first person plural imperfect *kal* as: can we find? follows

1. The Talmud [*Sotah* 36b] records that when Pharaoh proposed elevating Joseph to this high position, the royal astrologers exclaimed, "Will you set over us a slave whom his master bought for twenty pieces of silver?"

³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there can be no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰ You shall be in charge of my

ful interpretation and advice, Pharaoh concluded that it could only be that Joseph speaks in the name of God Who endowed him with His Spirit.]

This is yet another instance where even the mighty Pharaoh who considered himself a god responded in acknowledgment of the Supreme King of Kings (see footnote to v. 32).

The Kuzari [4:15] mentions that the Egyptians had no knowledge of the Ineffable Name of God — *HASHEM* — as Pharaoh was to say to Moses [Exodus 5:2]: *I know not HASHEM*. All they had was a vague notion of the existence of a Supreme Divinity named *Elohim*, whom Pharaoh mentioned several times in this episode.

By describing someone as possessing the *spirit of God*, one implies that he is endowed with the ultimate degree of natural wisdom and understanding (*Malbim*).

— Godliness is *within* him, it is part of him (*R' Bunem of Ps'his'cha*).

Oznaim laTorah offers that Pharaoh did not want to affront his own wizards, who, in ancient times, were renowned for their wisdom [cf. *1 Kings* 5:10]. He therefore made it a note to emphasize that this foreigner whom he was 'importing' as viceroy of Egypt was wise not because of his personal ability — as were the wizards — but because the spirit of God was within him, an external factor. Therefore his selection should not impugn the honor of the wizards of Egypt.

39. נִיאָמַר פָּרְעֹה אֶל-יֹסֵף. — Then Pharaoh said to Joseph.

After his courtiers acknowledged that Joseph was indeed endowed with God-given talents, Pharaoh turned to Joseph and addressed him directly (*Akeidah; Abarbanel*).

אַחֲרֵי הוֹדִיעַ אֱלֹהִים אוֹתָךְ אֵת כָּל-זֹאת — Since [lit. after] God has informed you of all this [i.e., the interpretation and the advice (*Rashbam*).]

'All this' is a reference also to Joseph's correct interpretation of the *cupbearer's* dream, as well as to the current situation about to be experienced in Egypt. Although Joseph's interpretation of *Pharaoh's* dream could not yet be verified absolutely until the famine began (see v. 54), nevertheless, since his interpretation met with the unanimous approval of Pharaoh and his courtiers, they regarded the prediction as if it had been fulfilled (*Ramban* v. 38).

[Other interpretations regarding how Pharaoh knew even at this premature time that Joseph's interpretation was correct have been discussed in the *comm.* to v. 37.]

אֵין נָבוֹן וְחָכָם כְּמוֹךָ — There can be no one so discerning and wise as you.

Discerning — in foreseeing the future, and *wise* in perceiving lessons from what you have seen and heard (*Rashbam*).

[Pharaoh was not merely complimenting Joseph; rather, this is the response to Joseph's suggestion in v. 33 that Pharaoh seek a 'discerning and wise man']:

'In following your suggestion to seek out a "discerning and wise man," we are certain that we would be unable to find anyone to fit this description as well as you do' [since you have so amply demonstrated your God-given wisdom] (*Rashi; R' Meyuchas*).^[1]

1. In so saying, Pharaoh unknowingly alluded to a basic tenet of prophecy. If a man has merited receiving from God extraordinary wisdom, it is certain that his natural wisdom too is

מקץ מא/מא-מב מא יִשָּׁק בְּלִעְמִי רַק הַכֶּסֶּא אֲגִדֵּל מִמֶּנּוּ:
וַיֹּאמֶר פֶּרְעָה אֶל־יוֹסֵף רְאֵה נָתַתִּי אֹתְךָ
עַל כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: וַיֹּסֶר פֶּרְעָה אֶת־
טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדוֹ וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ עַל־יַד יוֹסֵף

40. Pharaoh, like Potiphar [39:4-6] and the prison warden [39:22], perceives Joseph's greatness and appoints him virtual master over his court, granting him complete autonomy over matters of sustenance.

You [personally (Abarbanel)] shall be in charge of my palace [lit. house].

I.e., shall have full charge in all affairs of State (Haamek Davar).

The Hebrew phrase which literally reads *you shall be upon my house*, is elliptic. The meaning is: *You shall be the officer over my house (Ibn Ezra). HaKsav V'HaKabbalah* maintains that it is not elliptic, but the word *be* in itself is a noun meaning *the uppermost* as in *Hoshea 11:7*. Accordingly the phrase *על-ביתו* is in the construct state and means *the supreme [authority] of my house*.

And by your command [lit. and upon your mouth] shall all my people be sustained.

The verb *יִשָּׁק* is to be understood as *Onkelos* renders it *יִתֵּן*, i.e. *sustained*. That is, *all my people's*

needs shall be provided through you. Comp. 15:2 בֶּן מִשְׁקָה, steward, [the man by whose authority the needs of the household are dispensed]; and Psalms 2:12: נִשְׁקוּ כֹר, stimulate [sustain] yourselves in purity (Rashi).

Rashbam relates the word to *יִשָּׁק, arms* [see *I Kings 10:2*], and interprets: *you shall supervise the arming of my people against the enemy; Ibn Ezra* interprets somewhat similarly, as does *Chizkuni*.

Radak in his comm. to Torah also interprets the sense to be that the people will *equip themselves with arms* by Joseph's command. He draws support from *Onkelos'* rendering of *יִתֵּן*, which, unlike *Rashi*, he does not interpret to mean *sustain* but *arm*.

Ibn Ezra offers an alternative interpretation that the word is related to *נִשְׁקָה, kiss*, in the sense that all will kiss [i.e. pay homage to] Joseph in loving obeisance to his every command. Cf. the *Midrash. Radak* in *Shorashim* s.v. *נִשָּׁק* cites both views — that of *arms* and of *kissing*. He interprets the latter in the figurative sense of the cleaving of two kissing people and explains our passage to metaphorically describe how all the

at the highest level since God does not confer His wisdom on man until he has achieved his own maximum potential [see *Nedarim 38a*]. Therefore, if God endowed Joseph with secrets of the future, it is certain that *there is none so discerning and wise as him* in matters concerning the present (*Daas Soferim*).

The *Dubna Maggid* explains the intent of our verse with a parable:

Once a merchant opened a store carrying a large selection of very expensive items. The municipal authorities assessed a large tax on his inventory, upon which he protested, 'I am not a wealthy man, as you seem to think. All my merchandise is given to me on consignment; none of it belongs to me!'

The authorities replied, 'Nevertheless you must be a rich man, or your wholesalers would not give you so much credit.'

Similarly in the discussion between Pharaoh and Joseph, when Pharaoh said that the interpretation showed phenomenal wisdom, Joseph protested that the solution to Pharaoh's dilemma came not from him, but from God. Pharaoh responded, 'Nevertheless, God would not have given you this wisdom unless you were a wise a wise and understanding man in your own right.'

41 palace and by your command shall all my people be sustained. Only by the throne shall I outrank you."

41-42 ⁴¹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See — I have placed you in charge of all the land of Egypt." ⁴² And Pharaoh removed his ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand. He then had him dressed in gar-

Egyptians will 'cleave to the mouth of Joseph' — i.e., adhere to his every command.

רק הכסא אגדל ממך — Only [by] the throne shall I outrank you.

I.e., only by virtue of the fact that they refer to me as 'king', for which 'throne' is a metaphor. Cf. *I Kings* 1:37 (Rashi).

— Only in matters relating to the throne [i.e., the royal lineage] shall I outrank you (Radak).

According to Onkelos the implication of the definite article, הכסא, the throne, is that Pharaoh pointed to his throne and said: 'Only by this royal throne shall I be greater than you.'

41. נִיאָמַר פֶּרַעַה אֶל-יוֹסֵף. — Then [lit. and] Pharaoh said to Joseph.

After his first pronouncement, Pharaoh proceeded to inform Joseph that he was promoting him to a still higher post (Malbim).

[The formula and Pharaoh said recurs throughout these verses since these various pronouncements were uttered successively.]

— רָאָה נָתַתִּי אוֹתְךָ עַל כָּל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם — See, I have placed [lit. given] you in charge of [lit. over; upon] all the land of Egypt.

See and consider that you take good care to lead well, for it is a great thing that I have entrusted to you (Sforno).

Rashbam understands this in the present tense: See, I hereby appoint you etc. Pharaoh said this as he placed the signet ring on Joseph's finger [next verse].

[Cf. 1:29 הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לָכֶם, and 23:11 לֵךְ נָתַתִּיךָ where the sense is I hereby give to you (Rashbam); I have decided to give it to you (Abarbanel); it is as if I have already given it to you (Rashi).]

Possibly Joseph was abashed at the lofty appointment and was uncertain whether it was meant seriously or whether it was in mockery of his own statement 'Now therefore let Pharaoh seek out a wise and discerning man.' For this reason Pharaoh reiterated, 'See I have placed you in charge of all the land of Egypt.' This is indicated by the repetition here of and Pharaoh said to Joseph, although in the previous verse it was also Pharaoh speaking to Joseph (Midrashei Torah).

Rashi explains that although the expression I have given you idiomatically means, as Onkelos interprets it, I have appointed you, nevertheless term נָתַתִּי, give, expresses the concept of placing someone in a changed status, either in the context of raising to a high rank as in Deut. 26:19: וְלִתְתֹכֶךָ עֲלֵיוֹן or of degrading, as in Malachi: 2:9: נָתַתִּי אֶתְכֶם: נְבוֹיִם וְשָׁעֲלִים, I have made you contemptible and base.

42. ... יָרָם. — And Pharaoh removed his ring from [upon] his hand and put [lit. gave] it on Joseph's hand.

This signified that the recipient had become second to the king in rank (Rashi).

Ramban explains that the king's ring contained his royal seal [cf. Esther 8:8]. The giving of the ring to Joseph symbolized that he would henceforth be the leader of the entire government and would have the authority to seal decrees with the king's seal decree, as he desired (cf. R' Bachya).

מִקֵּץ מֵאֵלֶּיךָ מִן הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּלְבַּשׁ אֹתוֹ בְּגָדֵי שֵׁשׁ וַיֵּשֶׁם רֶכֶד הַזֶּהב
מֵאֵלֶּיךָ מִן הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּרְכַּב אֹתוֹ בְּמִרְכַּבֶּת
הַמֶּשֶׁנָּה אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ וַיִּקְרָאוּ לִפְנֵי אֲבִירָם
מִן הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּנְתֹּן אֹתוֹ עַל כָּל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר

He then had him dressed in garments of fine linen.

— This was highly valued in Egypt (Rashi).

The term שש refers to an exceptionally fine white linen made of flax found only in Egypt (Ibn Ezra to Exod. 24:4). Cf. Ezekiel 29:7.

In later Books of Scripture this linen is referred to by the term ביוץ. Cf. Esther 1:6; 8:15 (Karnei Or).

Garments of this material were worn only by the aristocracy and nobility (Rabag).

— And he placed the gold chain upon his neck. — וַיֵּשֶׁם רֶכֶד הַזֶּהב עַל צִנְאוֹ

I.e., the particular gold chain worn by the Grand Vizier. The placing of this chain by the king himself was an ancient symbol of investiture to high office (Abarbanel).

R' Shimon ben Gamliel said, Joseph well deserved the honors bestowed upon him because of his virtuous life. The hands, neck, and body which had refused to sin [with Potiphar's wife] were now adorned with the glorious signs of royalty (Midrash).

Rashi explains that רכד is synonymous with רעף both of which mean row. A chain is called a רכד because it is made up of links placed in a row. Cf. Proverbs 7:16 מְרִידִים עָרִשִׁי רִכְדָּתִי I have decked my bed with coverings — i.e., I have placed on my couch rows of rugs.

According to Radak it refers to a type of scarf.

וַיִּרְכַּב אֹתוֹ בְּמִרְכַּבֶּת הַמֶּשֶׁנָּה. 43. — [And] he also had him ride in his second royal chariot [lit. in the second chariot that was his].

I.e., the chariot second in rank to his chariot — that which drove

alongside Pharaoh's own (Rashi).

Ramban explains that according to Rashi's interpretation the word המשנה, the second, modifies the noun מרכבת, chariot, meaning that this was the second-rank chariot. Cf. similar construction in II Kings 23:4: כֹהֲנֵי הַמֶּשֶׁנָּה, the second-rank priests.

According to his own opinion however, Ramban maintains that in this context the term משנה refers to the person who was second in command to the king, as in the case of Mordechai who was the משנה, viceroy, to King Ahasuerus [Esther 10:3]. Cf. also the expression כֶּסֶף מִשְׁנָה which does not mean 'second-rank money' but the money of the 'second' purchase.

Accordingly, Ramban maintains that our passage refers to the chariot of the second-in-command. For Pharaoh had a chariot for his own exclusive use, as well as another chariot reserved for his viceroy, and another one for the third in rank. [Comp. also Radak Shorashim s.v. רכב and Abarbanel.]

It is not clear why Rashi adopts his interpretation rather than that of most other commentators such as Ramban. Perhaps Rashi was influenced by the qualifying phrase אֲשֶׁר לוֹ, that was his: If משנה meant viceroy, the passage should have read: בְּמִרְכַּבֶּת מִשְׁנָה, the chariot of his viceroy [lit. of his second-in-command] (Sefer HaZikaron).

The translation chariot follows Ibn Ezra who explains that the term מרכבה refers to a palanquin drawn by four horses. Comp. Radak to I Kings 10:29 and Shorashim s.v. רכב.

According to Rashbam, [as explained by Michlol Yofi] the spelling מרכבה [with a chirik, under the מ in our verse instead of מרכבה with a segol] refers not to the chariot itself but to the horse or mule which in this case was ridden by the viceroy.

— And they proclaimed before him: 'Aurech!' — וַיִּקְרָאוּ לִפְנֵי אֲבִירָם

I.e. as they rode him on the

ments of fine linen and he placed the gold chain upon his neck. ⁴³ He also had him ride in his second royal chariot and they proclaimed before him: "Avrech!" Thus, he placed him in charge of all the land of Egypt.

chariot the servants called out before him 'Avrech!' (*Ralbag*).

Avrech is a composite of two words: *Father* [i.e. counselor; mentor] to the *rech*, which means *king* in Aramaic [some editions of *Rashi* read 'in Roman' (i.e. in Latin=*rex*)]. Comp. the term *רִיבָא* in *Bava Basra* 4a (*Rashi*; *Onkelos*).

Rashbam follows this interpretation and cites 45:8: *He has made me a father to Pharaoh*.

Rashi proceeds to cite the view of the Sages in the *Midrash* and *Sifre* [cf. also *Targum Yonasan*]: R' Yehudah expounded, *Avrech* is an appellation for Joseph who was an *av* (father) in wisdom though *rach* (tender) in years. R' Yose ben Dorsmaskis said to him, How much longer will you distort Biblical texts for us? [The reason R' Yose considers this interpretation to be a 'distortion' is not clear.]¹¹ — Rather, — R' Yose continued, the word *avrech* is connected with *berech* (knee) [i.e. everyone presented to Joseph declared *אֲבֹרֵךְ*, *I will bend my knee*, in obeisance to Joseph (*Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*)]—signifying that all came and went forth only by his permission as the verse proceeds to tell us: *he placed him in charge of all the land of Egypt*.

Sforno [following *Ibn Janach* s.v.

הִבָּרַךְ] adopts a similar interpretation: This is like the imperative: *הִבָּרַךְ*, *kneel!* I.e., they announced: 'Everyone must kneel before him.' [Cf. *Radak* to *הַשָּׂבִים אֲשֶׁר־בָּם*, *Jeremiah* 25:3; the letters *אֶחָד* frequently interchange (*R' Bachya*).] This was like the announcement that was usually made before the king [as his chariot was passing (*Machberes Menachem*)] to instruct all subjects to bow down before him.

This was a special distinction, because such homage was usually reserved for the king alone, unless he specially decreed it, as here. We know this to be the case also from *Esther* 3:2 where Ahasuerus had to issue a special decree that everyone must bow down to Haman (*Abarbanel*).

וְנָתַן אוֹתוֹ עַל כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם — *Thus he placed* [lit. gave] *him in charge of* [lit. over; upon] *all the land of Egypt*.

HaKsav V'haKabbalah maintains that the phrase means: *In order to popularize him throughout the entire land of Egypt*, i.e. Pharaoh did all the above — gave him his ring, the special garments, the gold chain, and had them ride Joseph in the royal chariot and call out 'Avrech' before him *in order to make it manifestly clear that it was in-*

1. *Menachem Zion* homiletically explains the dispute between R' Yehudah and R' Yose ben Dorsmaskis as follows:

R' Yehudah interprets the name *Avrech* as a tribute to Joseph's mature wisdom. So impressed were the Egyptians with the brilliance of the young Hebrew that they named him in its honor. To this R' Yose retorted angrily that such an interpretation is a 'distortion' because history demonstrates that gentiles do not respect Jewish wisdom unless it is backed by power. The Egyptian regard for Joseph was based on the simple fact that they were forced by royal edict to approach him on bended knees!

פָּרַעַה אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֲנִי פָּרַעַה וּבִלְעֲדֶיךָ
לֹא־יָרִים אִישׁ אֶת־יָדוֹ וְאֶת־רִגְלוֹ בְּכָל־
מָה אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: וַיִּקְרָא פָּרַעַה שְׁם־יוֹסֵף
צָפְנָת פַּעֲנָח וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ אֶת־אֶסְנַת בַּת־פּוֹטִי

deed true that the king himself had appointed this former slave and prisoner the viceroy of Egypt. In this context, the term *give* connotes *popularizing*.

According to R' Bachya, Abarbanel and many others [comp. Or HaChaim] this phrase formed part of the proclamation: as he approached they cried, 'Kneel! He is the one whom Pharaoh placed in charge of all of the land of Egypt' — these ceremonies are all undertaken in compliance with Pharaoh's dream and accordingly no one may contest Joseph's authority.

[Compare "the honor bestowed upon the man whom the king especially wants to honor" in Esther 6:8ff.]

Akeidas Yitzchak interprets the subject of אתו to be not Joseph, but the proclamation: '... And this [i.e., the proclamation] was issued throughout the land of Egypt.

44. [And] וַיֹּאמֶר פָּרַעַה אֶל־יוֹסֵף
Pharaoh said to Joseph.

— Probably on his return from the public installation procession through the city (R' Hirsch).

פָּרַעַה — I am Pharaoh.⁽¹⁾

I.e., I have the authority as king to issue decrees for my kingdom and therefore I decree that: *Without you no one may lift*, etc. Alternatively: *I remain the king, but without your permission no one*

shall lift, etc. It is exactly similar in meaning to [v. 40]: *Only by the throne shall I outrank you*. But Pharaoh felt it necessary to reiterate it as he gave Joseph the ring (Rashi).

Cf. Radak: Only the royal title 'Pharaoh' will remain mine — in every other respect all power will be vested in you.

[Possibly Pharaoh was also intimating a warning to Joseph: Notwithstanding the powers I am granting you, *I am still king*. Never be tempted to usurp my throne as some people might be tempted to do after appointment to such a lofty position.]

According to Abarbanel [following Rashi's primary interpretation] Pharaoh was assuring Joseph: *I am Pharaoh*: have no fear of the jealousy of the masses — I will protect you.

The Sages in the Midrash offer the following exegesis: — 'Lest you think you will be as great as I,' Pharaoh said, 'I now specify "*I am Pharaoh*" — i.e., my greatness remains above yours.'

וּבִלְעֲדֶיךָ לֹא יָרִים אִישׁ אֶת־יָדוֹ וְרָגְלוֹ
And without you no man may lift up his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt.⁽²⁾

Without you — i.e. without your

1. R' Acha said, From the 'I' spoken by a mortal you may learn the force of the 'I' spoken by the Holy One Blessed be He. If Joseph attained all this greatness because Pharaoh said to him, *I am Pharaoh*, how much more so when the 'I' of the Holy One Blessed be He comes to pass — viz. *I have made and I will bear; and I will carry and rescue you* [Isaiah 46:4] (Midrash).

2. The exegetes perceive significance and the Hand of Providence in every passage and narrative in the Torah:

Because Joseph minimized his own greatness and humbled himself by saying [v. 16] בִּלְעֲדִי, it is beyond me, thereby ascribing greatness to God, he was rewarded now when greatness was bestowed upon him with that same word בִּלְעֲדִיךָ, without you [it is the same word except for the necessary change of suffix] (Tzror HaMor; Torah Sheleimah #104).

41 “Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh. And
44-45 without you no man may lift up his hand or foot in
 all the land of Egypt.” ⁴⁵ Pharaoh named Joseph
 Tzafnas Pane'ach, and he gave him Asenath

permission. The metaphor of *lifting up the hand or foot* should be understood as *Onkelos* understands it [‘no man shall raise his hand to gird on a sword or raise his foot to mount a horse’] (*Rashi*).

According to *Abarbanel* the expression is figurative: No one shall do anything or go anywhere throughout all the land of Egypt without your specific consent.

45. וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה שֵׁם יוֹסֵף — [And] Pharaoh named Joseph.

Appointees to a high position were customarily assigned a name commensurate with their new eminence. Similarly, when Hoshea became Moses' servant, Moses changed his name to Joshua [Numbers 13:16], and Nebuchadnezzar changed Daniel's name to Belteshazzar [Daniel 1:6] (*Rashbam* and *Radak*).

It is noted that the Providential importance of Joseph's change of name lies in the fact that it helped conceal the identity of the young Egyptian viceroy from his family until the time came for him to reveal himself. People referred to him as Tzafnas Pane'ach — no one knew him as Joseph (*Zohar*).

צַפְנַס פַּנֵּ'אךְ — Tzafnas Pane'ach.

Rashi and *Rashbam* [following *Onkelos*] interpret: מְפָרֵשׁ הַצִּפְנוֹת: ‘he who explains what is hidden.’ There is no other example of the word *Pane'ach* in Scripture. [*Radak* interprets similarly in *Shorashim* s.v. פַּעֲנַח.]

Rashbam and *Radak* maintain that this name was not Hebrew, but Egyptian.

Ibn Ezra adds that if the name is Egyptian, “We do not know its meaning; and if it is an Egyptian translation of the Hebrew name of Joseph, then we do not know the meaning of the name *Yoseph*” [i.e., the aspect of the Hebrew name that lends itself to this translation (*R' Chavel*; cf. *Yohel Or*).] The correct interpretation is as *Onkelos* renders it [see above].

Ramban [as explained by *R' Eisenstadt*] notes that since the expression *הַמְפָּרֵשׁ וְהַצִּפְנוֹת*, *explainer of secrets*, has become part of the liturgy [in the *Nusach Sfar* version of the Hebrew prayer *Nishmas*], it is apparent that the early scholars considered *פַּנֵּ'אךְ* a Hebrew word. Possibly, Pharaoh wished to do Joseph the courtesy of assigning him a name in his native tongue, and asked him how to say ‘one who reveals secrets,’ and Joseph told him ‘*tzafnas pane'ach*.’ Or possibly, Pharaoh knew the Canaanite language himself, Canaan being near Egypt. [Cf. *Sotah* 36b cited in footnote to v. 38 above, according to which Pharaoh did not know Hebrew.] Compare the case of Pharaoh's daughter who also gave Moses a name in the language of his people, Hebrew [see *Exod.* 2:10]. Although it is recorded that the Egyptian writers referred to Moses as *Munyas*, that is because they used the Egyptian equivalent of the Hebrew, just as *Onkelos* sometimes substitutes Aramaic names for the Hebrew as in the case of *Kadesh* and *Shur* [above 20:1] which he translated as *Rekem* and *Chigra*.

R' Hirsch draws an analogy for the meaning of the word *פַּנֵּ'אךְ* from the Rabbinic term *פֶּנַח* in *Yevamos* 115b [לְפָנֵי שְׂבִיטָא, which *Rashi* interprets in the sense of *safeguard*]. Accordingly, the name might mean: ‘he with whom the most secret things are safeguarded’ — who holds the key to the most hidden secrets.

מִקְץ מֵאָה
מִצָּרִים: וְיוֹסֵף בֶּן־שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה בְּעַמְדוֹ
לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף

לֹא — And he gave him.

As part of this effort to enhance Joseph's prestige, Pharaoh even arranged an aristocratic marriage for him. Possibly, Pharaoh took all these steps in order to accelerate Joseph's acceptance among the Egyptian aristocracy. Although the marriage is mentioned now — as part of all of these elevations — it did not occur until a bit later (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).^[1]

אֶסְנַת בַּת־פּוֹטִי פֶרַע כֹּהֵן אֵן — Asenath daughter of Poti Phera, Chief [following Rashi to 47:22; Ramban (see below) renders: priest] of On.

Poti Phera, the Chief of On, is identical with Potiphar (see above 37:36). Midrashically the word Phera is derived from פָּרַע, uncover, pull down, and it has the figurative sense of unman, emasculate. Potiphar was given that name because he had been emasculated in punishment for having purchased Joseph for sodomy (*Rashi; Sotah*

13b; *Bereishis Rabbah* 86:3). [See comm. to 37:36; 39:1; *Ramban* to 39:19 s.v. בְּרִכְרִים הָאֵלֶּה.]^[2]

Ramban asserts that the Midrashic identification of Poti Phera with Potiphar, Pharaoh's courtier, compelled Rashi [in his comm. to 47:22] to give a novel interpretation to the word *kohen*. Although other uses of the word *kohen* in Scripture generally refer to one who ministers to a deity, Rashi regards our passage and 47:22 as exceptions, since Potiphar/Poti Phera was chief of the butchers, and clearly not a priest. In this context, therefore, *kohen* must be rendered chief or governor.

Ramban suggests, however, that even according to the above-cited Midrash, we can render *kohen* in its usual sense of priest. When Potiphar's debility became public knowledge people began ridiculing him with the nickname Poti Phera, whereupon he resigned his post in shame and became a priest in the temple of On. It was customary among retired Egyptian nobility to devote themselves to such "godly" service.

Notwithstanding the above, Ramban

1. Pharaoh also arranged the marriage with Potiphar's daughter to ensure that Potiphar would not meet Joseph and blurt out: 'You are my slave!' Once Joseph was married to his daughter, Potiphar would never do this.

Secondly, this marriage was tacit proof to all that Potiphar had not really believed his wife's accusation against Joseph; otherwise, he would never have consented to a marriage that would bring Joseph in close association with his wife. The Rabbinic directive [*Yevamos* 26a] that 'one suspected of illicit intimacy with a woman is forbidden to marry her daughter,' is a course dictated by ordinary good sense (*Oznaim laTorah*).

2. In the opinion of many commentators, Poti Phera fathered Asenath before he was emasculated.

According to *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 38 and other Midrashic sources [cited in the comm. to 34:26 (p. 1492)], however, she was only Poti Phera's adopted daughter, born to Dinah from Shechem's assault. She came to Poti Phera in the following way: The sons of Jacob could not bear the presence of this child in their home, so Jacob made her an amulet engraved with HASHEM'S Name in order to indicate that she was the daughter of Dinah, daughter of Jacob, grandson of Abraham. He attached the amulet to a chain which he placed around her neck. The child was then cast out of Jacob's house and placed under a bush [Hebrew: *s'neh* — hence her name Asenath]. Providence eventually brought her to the house of Poti Phera whose wife, being childless, raised the child as her own. Since Asenath grew up in Poti Phera's home, Scripture refers to her as his daughter. As culled from the various parallel Midrashic accounts,

daughter of Poti Phera, Chief of On, for a wife. Thus Joseph emerged in charge of the land of Egypt.
 46 Now Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. Joseph left Pharaoh's

concludes that the word *kohen* is a general term denoting 'ministry' [or 'servitor' (*Ibn Ezra*)], not exclusively in religious matters. Accordingly, *II Samuel* 8:18 refers to David's sons as *kohanim* [rendered: chief ministers], although David's sons could not have been *kohanim* in the sense of priests since David hailed from the tribe of Judah, not Levi, while in the parallel verse in *I Chron.* 18:17 they are referred to as the foremost ones about the king. Cf. also *Job* 12:19 and *Isaiah* 61:10.

Cf. *Rashbam* who, following *Targum*, interprets *kohen On* as the governor of On. [He maintains, however, that in the plain sense Poti Phera is not to be identified with Potiphar.]

On — from the Egyptian word for sun — is identified by many with the later Heliopolis, the 'Sun City,' near today's Cairo. *R' Saadia Gaon* identifies it with Alexandria in Egypt.

Ramban suggests that On may have been the name of Poti Phera's deity.

it emerges that Joseph met her in Potiphar's house but never suspected her origins.

When Potiphar's wife slanderously accused Joseph of attempting to violate her, Asenath came on her own initiative to her father and convinced him of Joseph's innocence [as noted in 39:19 s.v. וַיִּתֵּן אָנּוּ]. The Sages mention that it was in this merit that she married Joseph.

This marriage was predestined, for as *Rashi* mentions in 39:1, Potiphar's wife had foreseen by astrology that she would be the ancestress of Joseph's children — but she did not know that their mother would be her 'daughter' rather than she.

The Midrashim record that when Joseph became viceroy and rode through the town on the royal chariot, the daughters stepped on to the wall [49:22] to gaze upon him as he passed by. Each of them threw him something precious, and since Asenath had nothing else, she threw her amulet. When Joseph examined it, he realized that she was Jacob's granddaughter. [See *comm.* to 48:9].

In any case, as *Alshich* observes, Joseph's marriage to Potiphar's own daughter vindicated him in the eyes of the Egyptians from the accusations of his master's wife.

1. The parenthetic detail of Joseph's age provides us with an important chronological focus. It informs us that Joseph — who was seventeen years old when he was sold [37:2] — served in Potiphar's house for one year [see 39:5 s.v. בֵּית וְיִשְׂרָאֵל (*Seder Olam*)] and spent the following twelve years in prison until he was brought before Pharaoh at the age of thirty [see 39:20 and 40:14, 23].

Joseph's age at this juncture also forms a basic link in *Rashi's* calculations of the total

וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף עַל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם — Thus Joseph emerged [lit. and Joseph went out] in charge of [lit. over; upon] the land of Egypt.

He emerged from Pharaoh in such a manner that it was evident to all that he was the ruler of Egypt (*Sforno*).

— His name went out; he became famous throughout the land of Egypt. Or, in the more literal sense, he traveled throughout the land of Egypt and announcements were made about him so that he would become known (*Ibn Ezra*).

46. יוֹסֵף בֶּן-שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה בָּעָמְרוֹ לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם — Now Joseph was thirty years old when he stood [lit. as he was standing] before Pharaoh king of Egypt.⁽¹⁾

— And was accordingly fit to rule (*Rashbam*).

According to *Abarbanel*, the knowledge of Joseph's age at this juncture points to the hand of Pro-

מִלִּפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וַיַּעֲבֹד בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: מִקֵּץ
מֵא-מִזְמַח מִן הַשָּׁבַע וַתַּעַשׂ הָאֶרֶץ בְּשִׁבְעַ שָׁנֵי הַשָּׁבַע
לְקַמְצִים: וַיִּקְבֹּץ אֶת-כָּל-אֶכָל | שָׁבַע
שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּתֵּן-אֶכָל
בְּעָרִים אֶכָל שְׂדֵה-הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר סָבִיבָתֶּיהָ

vidence. Ordinarily, one so young could never have risen to the highest position in a great land were it not for his God-given wisdom and grace.

This is the first time the monarch is referred to by his full title as 'Pharaoh, King of Egypt.' He was worthy of this auspicious title only because Joseph stood before him.

This title is subsequently suppressed, not to be used again until Moses appeared with the Divine request that Pharaoh — as king of Egypt — allow the Israelites to leave his land [Exodus 6:11ff]. Then, too, [when Pharaoh was given the opportunity to take part in the destiny of Israel], the Torah shows him respect by using his full title (*Tanchuma Yashan*).

וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף מִלִּפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וַיַּעֲבֹד בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם — [And] Joseph left [from]
Pharaoh's presence and he passed
through the entire land of Egypt.

The previous verse also speaks of Joseph's 'going out' over the land of Egypt. There, as noted, it is in the figurative sense: Joseph *emerged* as the ruler; his fame went throughout the land (*Ibn Ezra*). Here, as *Sforno* comments, the intent is that Joseph literally *toured* the length and breadth of the land to attend to its affairs.

— He made himself known to the populace, learned about the countryside, warned the populace of the impending famine, and commissioned the construction of royal granaries in every city (*Akeidah*).

Furthermore the additional

nuance here implies a departure beyond that of the previous verse: Joseph now left *פרעה* *Pharaoh's presence*, thus intimating that the earlier travels were chiefly ceremonial and under Pharaoh's direction; now Joseph traveled *independent* of the king's direct supervision, and began to perform duties of State in his position of viceroy (*Alshich*).

Haamek Davar perceives that the contextual flow of the verse informs us that Joseph's appearance before Pharaoh, his promotion, and his trip through Egypt all took place in one year — when Joseph was thirty years old. [Thus the verse would be rendered: *And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh and when Joseph left Pharaoh's presence and passed through the entire land of Egypt.*]

47. The seven years of abundance. Joseph's plan is implemented.

— [And] the earth produced [lit. *made*] during the seven years of abundance.

The connotation of this passage is as *Onkelos* paraphrased it: And the *inhabitants* of the land gathered; thus the word *earth* refers to the earth's inhabitants [cf. *Ezek.* 14:12]. Nevertheless, the word *תָּעַשׂ* [which *Onkelos* renders figuratively as *gathered*] does not real-

number of years Joseph was separated from his father, and in determining that Jacob spent fourteen years in the Academy of Eber [see 28:9 and chart on p. 1173]. Among other things, it is also a factor in determining that the sale of Joseph preceded Isaac's death by twelve years [see chart on p. 1529].

41 presence and he passed through the entire land of
47-48 Egypt.

⁴⁷ The earth produced during the seven years of abundance by the handfuls. ⁴⁸ He gathered all food of the seven years that came to pass in Egypt, and he placed foods in the cities — the food of the field

ly lose its primary meaning of *made*. [The literal intent is that the earth itself — not its inhabitants — yielded crops in such abundance that the grain could be scooped up by the handful] (Rashi as explained by *Levush*; comp. *Targum Yonasan*; *Rashbam*).

לִקְצוֹם — By the handfuls.

I.e., the grain was collected *handful by handful, fist upon fist* (Rashi).

This can be understood to mean that the abundance was so great that food was accumulated 'hand over fist'. R' David Feinstein, however, explains that the intent is that such scrupulous care was taken in carrying out Joseph's requisition policy, that not even a single handful was overlooked.

Each ear produced a handful of grain (Rashbam).

Ramban following Onkelos renders: *Into store houses* [i.e., the people gathered the abundant produce and heaped it into store houses, or: the earth produced enough surplus for storage]. He maintains that the term קִמָּץ is synonymous with נִמָּץ, a pit, and refers to storehouses excavated in the earth.

48-49. The execution of the plan outlined in verses 35-36.

וַיִּקְצֹץ אֶת-כָּל-אֶבֶל שָׁבַע שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ בָּאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם — [And] he gathered all food of the seven years that came to pass in Egypt.

'He' refers to Joseph who is the last named subject [in v. 46] (Ramban).

Egypt is specified because only this abundance and surplus was experienced in no other country. This

explains why other countries did not store food, although they undoubtedly heard about the famine (Ramban v. 2).

'All' the food is certainly not to be understood literally, or else they would have died of starvation [cf. v. 57 below]. It means that he gathered as much he could (Ibn Ezra). Cf. *Ralbag*: He gathered whatever he could after first leaving the people their requirements for food and planting.

Ramban maintains however, that the passage is to be taken literally: Joseph gathered the *entire crop* — either at a low price or by force [see below, 47:14] — and released each year only as much as the people required for their sustenance. His purpose was to prevent waste of food, and this was the intent of the plan he outlined in v. 35. Ramban further draws a distinction between אֶבֶל, food, and קֶרֶן, grain, [verses 35-36; our verse, and verse 49]: food refers to all edibles — even dried fruit — which Joseph stored up in the cities to provide the essential minimum for the preservation of life, while grain refers to the balance of the crops, which he kept in storehouses. He observes, however, that Onkelos drew no distinction between the terms.

According to Or HaChaim, following the interpretation that חֲמִשָּׁה in v. 34 refers to a tax of a fifth of all produce, the gathering of 'all' the food mentioned in this verse refers to that levy; or it refers to whatever surplus he could buy in addition to the fifth that was levied [the latter follows *Abarbanel*].

וַיִּתֵּן-אֶבֶל בְּעָרֵים — And he placed [lit. gave] food in the cities.

I.e., in royal granaries which were

מקץ מת נתן בתוכה: ויצבר יוסף בר כחול הים
הרבה מאד עד כי חדל לספר ביאין
מספר: וליוסף ילך שני כנים בטרם
תבוא שנת הרעב אשר ילדה לו אסנת

built by Joseph's order in every city
(Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer).

— This too was an example of Joseph's wisdom: he did not build the granaries in the fields where their contents could be stolen, but in the more secure cities (*Abarbanel*).

אכל שדה העיר אשר סביבותיה נתן
בחוקה — *The food of the fields around each city he placed [lit. gave] within it.*

— For each type of soil preserves its own produce. [Consequently], people add to grain some local soil and this inhibits it from decaying (*Rashi*; the latter view follows R' Nechemiah in the *Midrash*; [*Levush* interprets differently]).

Joseph did this as a measure of justice: He did not take produce from one city and store it elsewhere. Only the produce of fields far away from cities were taken to royal granaries in central locations to be stored for eventual export (*Abarbanel*).

— At the same time, as noted above, this local storage saved freight charges from city to city (*Chizkuni*).

49. ויצבר יוסף בר כחול הים הרבה
מאד — [*And*] *Joseph amassed* [see v. 35] *grain like the sand of the sea — in great abundance.*

The expression *like the sand of the sea* is hyperbolic (*Radak*).

עד כי חדל לספר — *Until he ceased*

taking stock [lit. to count].

The antecedent of *he* is not identified. The verse means: Until whoever was numbering stopped numbering (*Rashi*; see above v. 13 s.v. השיב).

According to *Ramban* 'he' refers to Joseph who is the subject of the previous verses as well.

כִּי־אֵין מִסְפָּר — *For there was no number.*

I.e., the quantity of grain grew beyond the capacity of the person in charge of counting to compute it (*Rashi*).

The calculations were so intricate that they had to be abandoned (*Alshich*; *Or HaChaim*); the quantities were beyond human imagination (*Sforno*).¹¹

Ralbag interprets this as a hyperbole.

R' David Feinstein explains that such a policy of accumulation generally has a goal of gathering a predetermined minimum amount. Once that goal has been reached, it is no longer necessary to be as scrupulous in counting future accumulations. This, then, is the intent of our verse: the stores of grain became so huge that it was no longer necessary to keep count; there would surely be more than enough for every conceivable exigency.

1. Cf. *R' Hirsch* who refutes the foolish notion that the ancients were simply unable to count large numbers. The verse does not mean that such numbers did not exist, but that the quantities of food grew to be meaningless. In modern times, for example, we are accustomed to speaking of sums of money or capacities for destruction that go beyond the mind's capacity to grasp them meaningfully.

41 around each city he placed within it. ⁴⁹ Joseph
49-50 amassed grain like the sand of the sea in great abundance until he ceased taking stock, for there was no number.

⁵⁰ Now to Joseph were born two sons — before the year of famine was to set in — whom Asenath

— They no longer calculated quantities of grain; they now began numbering the storage places (R' Bachya).

50. Joseph's children: Manasseh and Ephraim.

ויליוסף ילד שני בנים — Now to Joseph was born two sons.

The Hebrew verb ילד, *was born*, is in singular. The term is either to be construed collectively, or perhaps they were twins and the singular verb denotes that they were both born as the result of a single childbirth (Radak).

⚡ Abstention from conjugal relations in time of famine.

בשנה תבוא שנת הרעב — Before the year of famine was to set in [lit. would come (kal imperfect).]¹¹

[From the emphasis that Joseph's children were born *before* the onset of the famine], the Sages (Ta'anis 11a) derive that one must abstain from conjugal relations in a time of famine (Rashi).

The Talmud *ibid.* adds: It was taught that those who are childless are permitted.¹²

When the world is suffering tribulation and destruction a man may not indulge in procreating, lest it be that while the Holy One Blessed be He is engaged in destroying the world this man would be building. Cf. Job 30:3 where Job said: בָּחֶסֶד וּבְכֶפֶן גִּלְמוֹד, *solitary in want and famine*, i.e., when the world is in want and famine-stricken, be *galmud* [solitary] — exile yourself [galeh] from the conjugal bed! (Tanchuma Noah 11; cf. Yerushalmi Ta'anis 1:6).

[According to the above, then, con-

1. That this exegesis presumes the famine to have raged in Egypt as well is not contradicted by v. 54 below which mentions that Egypt had bread. What they had was the wheat they had stored in the abundant years, but the land itself was not yielding new crops and the Torah therefore emphasizes that Joseph's children were born *before* the onset of the famine (Mizrachi; Tzeidah laDerech).

2. This Talmudic exegesis is cited as halachah in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 1574:4: "It is a *mitzvah* for one to hunger oneself [i.e. eat restrictedly (Mishneh Berurah)] during a year of famine, and it is prohibited to have conjugal relations therein except for the evening of *tevillah* [i.e., the evening of a woman's ritual immersion in a *mikvah* when the obligation of fulfilling one's conjugal duty is greatest]; and for 'childless people' it is permitted" [to have relations at any permissible time — even not on the evening of *tevillah* — until such time as one's wife conceives (Beis Yosef)].

The halachic authority Magen Avraham prohibits relations for couples with children in such times even on the evening of *tevillah*, but the consensus of Rabbinic opinion differ. They appear to be lenient regarding the evening of *tevillah*, relying on the opinion of Tosafos in Ta'anis 11a cited in the commentary above that such abstinence is not *obligatory* but a *מנהג*, custom of exceptional piety.

As Ritva to Megillah 28a observes: 'We often find that the Sages in the Talmud will describe something as *אסור*, prohibited, when in reality it is nothing more than a pious custom.'

The Poskim also express varying opinions regarding whether the permissive category חסידים, 'childless people' [lit. denied children] mentioned in the Talmud refers to those who have

jugal relations would be prohibited not only in times of famine but in times of calamity as well, and the dispensation mentioned in *Shulchan Aruch* permitting relations on the evening of *tevillah* [immersion; see footnote] would not apply. However, this extension of the prohibitions to times of calamity has not become the accepted *halachah*. See footnote and *Magen Avraham* to *Orach Chaim* 574:4).

Tosafos in *Taanis* *ibid.* s.v. אָסוּר notes that this rule is apparently contradicted by the tradition that Yocheved, youngest child of Levi, was born as he entered Egypt [see *Rashi* to 46:26; *Numb.* 26:59; *Bava Basra* 120a] — a time when the famine still raged. It would therefore follow that Levi had conjugal relations during the famine [and since he had previously begotten Gershon, Kehath, and Merari (46:11), he could not rely on the dispensation permitted childless couples.]

— In answer, *Tosafos* suggests that this was not *forbidden* except to someone who wished to conduct himself with an extra measure of piety [לְגִהּוֹן עֲצֻמָּה בְּחֻסְדִּית]. Joseph chose to abstain for this reason, but other people [including Levi] did not.

Tosafos' comment regarding Levi evokes much comment by later exegetes who are discomfited by the implication that Levi —

ancestor of the tribes who would minister to *HASHEM* and to whom Moses in his blessings would refer to as pious [see *Deut.* 33:8] — conducted himself less piously than Joseph. They offer several additional solutions to defend Levi's action.

Tosefos HaRosh Hadar Zekeinim proposes that Joseph and Levi differed in whether one has fulfilled the *mitzvah* of procreation if all his children are sons [see footnote]. Apparently maintaining that one has thereby fulfilled it, Joseph abstained, while Levi maintained that one does not fulfill the *mitzvah* until he has also begotten a daughter. Not having a daughter as yet, Levi did not abstain.

In a similar manner and citing *Mizrachi*, *Maharsha* defends *Tosafos'* opinion and maintains that since Joseph still had no daughter he would have been permitted to procreate, but he abstained *as an act of piety*. Levi, however, chose the obligation of cohabiting in order to beget a daughter and fulfill the *mitzvah* of procreation. Alternatively, this conception might have taken place on the evening of *tevillah*, when, according to *Yerushalmi*, cohabitation is permitted even at times of famine [see *Orach Chaim* 574:4].

Or HaChaim emphasizes that immediately after deriving from our verse that one should refrain from cohabitation in time of famine, the Talmud states clearly that childless people are permitted to cohabit. Accordingly, both Joseph and Levi — who lacked daughters and consequently had not fulfilled the *mitzvah* of procreation — were exempted from any prohibition against cohabitation during the famine. Furthermore, since Moses describes Levi as the epitome of *חסידות*, *devout piety* (see *Deut.* 33:8), *Or HaChaim* finds it difficult to accept *Tosafos'* contention that Levi failed to match Joseph's piety.

no children at all, or if it applies also to those who are 'childless' in the sense that they have not yet fulfilled the *mitzvah* of procreation [פְּרִיָּה וּרְבִיָּה] by having begotten both a son and daughter. In *Rashi's* interpretation of the term in the Talmud (ad. loc.), he adopts the latter sense. Many *Acharonim* [later commentators] as well apparently adopt this view [with the notable exception of the *Magen Avraham*] and they permit relations on the evening of *tevillah* [see *Rambam*, *Hilchos Taanis* 2]. Accordingly many *Poskim* are lenient in cases such as a marriage where either partner has not begotten a son and daughter or where there are other extenuating circumstances. This leniency basically follows the view of *Taz* in *Diurei David* as cited by *Eliyahu Rabbah*, which maintains: [only] "conjugal relations for pleasure come under this prohibited category, since it is proper to share in distress with the rest of the population. But to propagate the species or when one's urge overpowers him and [to deny] it might lead to other sins, there is no prohibition, and this falls under the permitted category of 'childlessness' which was the term used because it is clear [i.e., the term *childless* was not meant literally]; the

Therefore, he contends that neither brother was required to abstain. The Scriptural allusion to such abstinence in Joseph's case is an instance of *אין אינו ענין*, the hermeneutical principle that sometimes Scripture teaches a law even though it does not apply to the person or case where it is stated. Thus, the law of abstinence is binding upon people who have sons and daughters only, even though it is taught with regard to Joseph, to whom it did not apply.

Ran and *Chizkuni* [similarly *Pa'aneach Raza* cited by *Maharsha*] suggest that the criteria for the abstinence is when Israelites, rather than the gentile world at large, are beset by famine. Consequently, although Joseph was not personally affected by the famine, he was required to abstain because, as far as he knew his family in Canaan was experiencing hunger. On the other hand, because Levi and his brothers knew that they were faring well in that stage of the famine and had sufficient sustenance [see *Rashi* 42:1 s.v. *לֹא הָיָה חֶרֶד*], they were not obligated to abstain. Furthermore, they did not have to abstain out of concern for Joseph — who, for all they knew, might have been suffering from the famine — since he was but an individual.

Citing the above, *Divrei David* adds that in any event it was only conjugal relations for pleasure that were proscribed — not cohabitation to propagate the species [see *Taz* in footnote].

Riva suggests that Levi may, indeed, have abstained until he learned that Joseph was well and the ruler of Egypt. Only then did his wife conceive.

It is additionally noted by *Mizrachi* that none of this is contradicted by Isaac who indulged in marital intimacy during a famine [see *Rashi* to 26:8], because — as *Mizrachi* explains — there was no famine in that

country. [Or according to *Maharsha* the famine had ended before that incident.]

According to *Rashbam*, we are now told that these sons were born to Joseph before the onset of the famine to prepare us for a later verse. Jacob came to Egypt during the second year of the famine and seventeen years later on his death-bed announced that Joseph's two sons born before his arrival would be accounted as his own [48:5], while the progeny born to him after them, i.e. those born to Joseph after Jacob's arrival, would be Joseph's [48:6]. Therefore Ephraim and Manasseh are identified as the sons born to Joseph before the famine and before Jacob arrived. However, children born to Joseph after Jacob's arrival were to be reckoned as part of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh for purposes of the division of the Land in *Eretz Yisrael*.

אֲשֶׁר יִלְדֶה-לּוֹ אִסְתָּת בַּת-פְּטִי פַרְעֹה בָּהֶן
— Whom Asenath daughter of
Poti Phera Chief of On [see v. 45 on
translation of בָּהֶן as chief] bore to
him.

This is mentioned to clarify that these were not children of another wife (*R' Shmuel ben Chafni*).

[After stating that Joseph had two sons, the verse concludes with the apparently superfluous statement that Asenath bore them to him.]

— The verse stresses that Joseph's only wife was Asenath (*Radak*); it

Sages used it because they preferred to use an unconditional term (*מילתא רמטיקא נקט*).

However, in his commentary to *Orach Chaim*, *Taz* (574:2) takes a different view. There he says that only people with no children at all were permitted to cohabit because the Sages perceived that the Scriptural prohibition could not have encompassed even those who felt the anguish of being completely childless. People with children, however — even if they had not fulfilled the *mitzvah* of procreation because they did not have a son and a daughter — are surely not the objects of pity and should not be absolved of the obligation to share in the suffering of the masses.

Furthermore the definition of what degree of scarcity would qualify as a 'famine' is in itself somewhat vague in Rabbinic literature since 'famines' in the severe Scriptural sense were apparently rare occurrences. Together with the other variables mentioned above, this might account for the lack of a definitive ruling on this topic in the halachic codes. [See *Shaarei Teshuvah*; *Eliyahu Rabbah*; *Shiyurei Knesses HaGedolah*; *Pri Megadim*.]

מִקֵּץ מֵאֵלֶּיךָ אֶת־שֵׁם הַבְּכוֹר מְנַשֶּׁה בִּי־נִשְׁנִי אֱלֹהִים נב אֶת־כָּל־עַמְלִי וְאֵת כָּל־בֵּית אָבִי: וְאֵת

was important to Joseph that only Asenath be his wife because that was public proof that he had not sinned with her mother (*Chizkuni*).

— *R' Hirsch* perceives a different stress in the phrase: *Asenath ... bore to him*; the children she conceived, bore, and raised were dedicated to the ideals of Joseph; not those in which *she* had been raised. She was an aristocratic, cultured Egyptian, while he was 'merely' an enslaved, imprisoned Hebrew raised to prominence only by whim of the king. It would not have been surprising for her to dominate the home. Had that happened, the children would have been hers, not his. Therefore the verse tells us that Asenath adopted Joseph's spiritual and moral outlook. She bore children to him.

To be the only Jew in Egypt, and to be married to the daughter of an idolatrous priest, yet to raise children who remain the model after whom Jewish parents bless their children — *may God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh* (48:20) — is no small *זְכוּת*, *privilege*.

— *R' Munk*, citing *Radak*, notes a different significance in this phrase: Despite the greatness of Joseph and the sincerity of Asenath, the unsavory influences of Egypt insinuated themselves into the character of Joseph's children. This accounts for some of the evil deeds performed centuries later by the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. Even Jacob was apprehensive in this regard as *Rashi* points out in 48:8.

51. מְנַשֶּׁה — *Manasseh*. [Hebrew: *Menasheh*].

— Lit. He Who causes to forget [= *הַמְשַׁכֵּחַ*] (*R' Shmuel ben Chofni Gaon*).

— *For* [he said (*Ibn Ezra*)] "God has made me forget [Hebrew: *nashah*, in as-

sonance with *Menasheh*] *all my hardship*" [lit. *toil*].

— I.e. which I endured since I was sold (*Radak*).

Upon seeing the end-result of all his travail, Joseph thanked God for allowing him to forget the hardships imposed upon him; he fully recognized their purpose and harbored no malice toward anyone (*HaKsav V'HaKabbalah*).

The verb *נָשַׁח*, *caused me to forget*, is related to *נָשָׂה*, *displaced*, as in *נִשְׁכָּח*, *the displaced nerve*. It implies forgetfulness in the sense that God displaces one thought from the forefront of one's mind and replaces it with other thoughts. Cf. *Lamentations* 3:17: *נָשִׁיחִי טוֹבָה*, *I have forgotten goodness* (*Karnei Or*).

[Cf. *Rashbam* who maintains that in distinction with *נָשַׁח* whose root is *נָשָׂה*, the root of *נָשַׁח* is *נָשָׂה*, the vowelization being similar to *נָחַן* from *חָנָן*. He holds that if the root were *נָשָׂה*, then our word would be vowelized *נָשַׁח*, similar to *רָקַח* from *רָקַח*; *נָשַׁח* from *נָשָׂה*. *Ibn Ezra* cites both views including that which maintains that the vowels *נ* and *נ* are interchangeable. (It is interesting however that neither *Ibn Janach* nor *Radak* in *Shorashim* list *נָשָׂה* as a root; nor do they include *נָשַׁח* among the words in the [נָשָׂה].)]

The Talmudic term *נָשָׂה*, lit. *forgotten house*, is used by the Sages [*8ava Basra* 12b] in reference to the paternal home of a married woman since a woman — like a man — upon marriage 'forgets' her parents' home and clings instead to her spouse [see 2:24] (*R' Bachya*).

וְאֵת כָּל־בֵּית אָבִי — *And all my father's household*.

I.e., God made me 'forget' the hardships to which my brothers subjected me in my paternal home. He imbued me with a prophetic spirit to recognize that the Hand of Providence engineered my tribulations during those years, thereby causing me not to harbor hatred toward my brothers for their

41 51 Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh for, "God
51-52 has made me forget all my hardship and all my
father's household." 52 And the second son he named

maltreatment of me [see 45:7, 8] (*Akeidah*).

The commentators agree that the implication is certainly not that Joseph — Jacob's favorite child — was so crass as to have named a child in grateful commemoration of having *forgotten* his paternal home. It has been noted that the very fact that he evokes his paternal home in this pronouncement in the very moment of his rejoicing at the birth proves that Joseph did not forget it! Furthermore, an obvious question arises:

❖ Why, indeed, did Joseph 'forget' his father at all; why did he not now, as viceroy of Egypt, seize the opportunity to visit his aged father whom he had not seen for about twenty years and who certainly must have thought him to be dead?

Even if a personal visit would prove impossible at this very busy juncture in his new executive position, Joseph could have dispatched a personal emissary with a letter telling Jacob of his whereabouts. Also, in view of the impending famine, why didn't Joseph inform Jacob that grain would be available through him?

As discussed in the footnote to 37:28, it is the traditional view of the Sages that when the brothers sold Joseph they proclaimed a *cherem* [solemn ban] against anyone who divulged what had been done with Joseph. According to some opinions noted there, Joseph, too, was bound by this *cherem* — against his will — from contacting his father, or disclosing his whereabouts, which ac-

counts for Joseph's failure to contact Jacob throughout his twenty-two years in Egypt. Some reasons are noted in that footnote as to why the Providential plan necessitated Jacob's ignorance of Joseph's whereabouts — so that the family destiny and Jacob's descent into Egypt could develop according to the Providential plan, and also so that this absence be an atonement for the similar period that Jacob was away from Isaac.

Thus, Joseph was bound by a solemn oath against contacting his father. Accordingly, his reason for giving the name Manasseh must be perceived as a painful display of gratitude to God for making his ordeal and solitude less painful by having granted him the fortitude to 'forget' his father's house in the sense that he was not constantly obsessed by the need to contact Jacob. (See *HaKsav V'HaKabbalah* [also *Akeidas Yitzchak*] where the verb *שָׁכַח*, as noted above, means *displaced for me* — i.e., caused thoughts of home to be 'displaced' from my thoughts by the heavy responsibilities assigned him).⁽¹⁾

Haamek Davar interprets similarly and adds that the real reason Joseph did not take steps to contact his father was that he considered his dreams, in which first his brothers and then his father as well bowed to him (see 37:7ff), as a form of prophecy. He considered it his duty not to negate the dreams so as not to be guilty of suppressing prophecy [which the Sages (*Sanhedrin* 89a) consider a capital offense].

This essentially follows the interpretation of *Ramban* in 42:9 who maintains that had Joseph's where-

1. R' David Feinstein suggests that Joseph gratefully viewed this child as a Divine gift whereby he could now refocus his orientation — as every new father does — from his parental roots to this new link in the eternal chain of human destiny. The child would help Joseph 'forget' his former misery and look to the future rather than to the past. This concept is embodied in the Torah's teaching above, [2:24] that upon marriage a man shall leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife. With a new child, a father's priority goes to his child. This concept Joseph wished to preserve in naming the child Manasseh.

שם השני קרא אפרים ביהפּרני אלהים
בארץ ענני ותכלינה שבע שני השבע
אשר היה בארץ מצרים: ותחלינה שבע
שני הרעב לבוא באשר אמר יוסף ויהי

מקץ
מא/נגנר
ג
נר
רביעי

abouts been known, Jacob would have redeemed him regardless of how extravagant his ransom might have been. [For, as noted above, Jacob would never have left the sacred environs of *Eretz Yisrael* to go to Egypt unless circumstances made it absolutely necessary.] Joseph perceived that the fulfillment of his dreams — that his family would bow to him — could not possibly be accomplished in *Eretz Yisrael* [where Jacob was considered a prince of God (*R' Eisenstadt*)] and he was hoping that it would be effected in Egypt as a result of his, Joseph's, new power there. This feeling was enhanced when Pharaoh's dreams made clear that the famine could bring them all to Egypt where the dreams would be fulfilled.

Thus, in effect, Manasseh's name was an acknowledgment that God had given Joseph the fortitude to ignore Jacob and allow Providence to take its course. For although Joseph was obligated by the *mitzvah* of honoring his father to contact him, nevertheless the Will of God as evidenced by the prophetic dream inspired him to subordinate his own wishes to those of his Creator, and God replaced Joseph's constant thoughts of his father with other thoughts.

Malbim following *Alshich* suggests that Joseph gave his child that name as a constant reminder that he should not now in prosperous time forget his former hardships and father's house. This is similar in concept to eating bitter foods on Passover to remind us — in times of freedom — of former exile. Thus, Joseph named the child Manasseh to keep alive the memory that God Providentially engineered a series of events resulting in Joseph's lengthy absence from home and thrusting him into a position of compelled 'forget-

fulness' of his paternal home. This condition grieved him greatly.

R' Hirsch offers that the verb נָשָׂה signifies not only to forget, but also to be a creditor so that נָשָׂה can be rendered: "God has turned my misfortunes and my family into my creditors." It was as if Joseph said: I feel indebted to my sufferings and my mistreatment at the hands of my family, because God has made them the vehicles to bring me abundant happiness.

52. אפרים — *Ephraim* [i.e., fruitful, from the Hebrew *pri*.]

יהפּרני אלהים — *For* [he said (*Ibn Ezra*)] *God has made me fruitful* [Hebrew: *hifrani* from פָּרַי, fruit, in assonance with *Ephraim*].

— With children, wealth, and honor (*Radak*).

בארץ ענני — *In the land of my suffering*.

I.e., in the land where I had suffered so much until now (*Radak*).

With all the greatness, splendor, and honor Joseph now enjoyed, along with the wealth and grain that he controlled, he nevertheless viewed Egypt as 'the land of his suffering' inasmuch as it was far away from his father's home and from the Holy Land (*Abarbanel*).

— There could be no greater proof of Joseph's heartfelt loyalty to his origins and his determination to refuse assimilation into the Egyptian culture than the names he gave his children. They were constant reminders of his duty to be faithful to his family and to *Eretz Yisrael* (*R' Hirsch*).

41 Ephraim for, "God has made me fruitful in the land
53-54 of my suffering."

⁵³ The seven years of abundance that came to pass
in the land of Egypt ended. ⁵⁴ And the seven years of
famine began approaching just as Joseph had said.

Torah Sheleimah cites Chemdas Yamim that the phrase is to be rendered: *In the land of my poverty*. Joseph's intent was that he had been privileged to rise to such heights not within the environs of Eretz Yisrael, but only in a spiritually poor land outside it; similar to a poor man who is given something from the king's table on the condition that he eat it outside.

According to Tzror HaMor, Joseph was commemorating the greatness of the miracle: He rose to such heights in the very place where they knew he had been a slave. Cf. Psalms 113:7-8: *He raises the poor from the dust ... to set them with the great men.*

The name Ephraim — which is composed of letters of the word epher (ashes) in the plural form — contains an allusion to Abraham and Isaac who are associated with epher. Of Abraham it is written [18:27]: *אָנֹכִי עָפֹר וָאֵפֶר, I am but dust and ashes*, and Isaac is considered as having had his ashes on the altar [at the Akeidah]. Thus the descendants of Israel are referred to by the designation Ephraim as it is written [Jeremiah 31:19]: *Truly, Ephraim [a general designation for the Ten Tribes (Metzudos ibid. v. 17)] is a dear son to me (Daas Zekeinim).*

53. The onset of the famine.

וּתְחִלָּיָה שֶׁבַע שָׁנֵי הַשָּׁבַע אֲשֶׁר הָיָה
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם — [And] the seven-
years of abundance that came to
pass [lit. that was] in the land of
Egypt ended.

The singular הָיָה, *that was*,
is used in the collective sense since

the seven years were viewed as one
entity (Radak).

In the land of Egypt is specified
because it was only there that this
abundance was experienced, not
elsewhere [see v. 48].

The Midrash perceives וּתְחִלָּיָה
[...ended] to be homiletically related to
בִּלְלִי, *beauty, perfection*. The verse con-
notes that the years of abundance were
perfectly beautiful, and that the people,
too, were handsome amid all the abun-
dance [comp. footnote to next verse].

54. וּתְחִלָּיָה שֶׁבַע שָׁנֵי הַרָעָב לָבֹא —
And the seven years of famine
began approaching.

Their onset was particularly
noticeable since famine was rare in
Egypt. Moreover, the famine came
suddenly and with great force, as
Joseph had predicted [v. 30]: *The
seven years of famine will arise
after them* — violently, as if they
forcibly had been restrained up to
that time (Tz'ror HaMor).¹¹

Normally, a famine begins slowly
as the supplies begin to dwindle. In
this case, however, it struck with
horrible suddenness. There was no
transition period. For seven con-
secutive years the Nile rose and ir-
rigated the land causing abundant
crops. Then, without warning, in
the following year the Nile did not
overflow, causing drought and the
rotting of subsequent crops. Already
with the first year of the

1. According to the Midrash the word וּתְחִלָּיָה is homiletically derived from חֲלָה, *sickness*: The seven years of famine brought sickness [i.e. sickly crops (Sifsei Kohen) or disease from hunger (Baalei HaTosafos)] with them. It reached a point that people sought even a coarse loaf of bread and could not find one. Then they exclaimed: Is this not אֲכָרִי יוֹסֵף just as Joseph had said?!

מקץ מא/בה-נו נה רעב בכל-הארצות ובכל-ארץ מצרים
 היתה לחם: ונתרעב כל-ארץ מצרים
 ויצעק העם אל-פרעה ללחם ויאמר
 פרעה לכל-מצרים לכו אלי-יוסף אשר-
 נא יאמר לכם מעשוי: והרעב היתה על כל-

famine there was neither sowing nor harvest. It was as if people were sitting and eating and the next moment there was no food to be had. Even the most common bread suddenly became unavailable (*Abarbanel; Ralbag; based upon Tanchuma*).

באשר אמר יוסף — Just as Joseph had said [i.e. foretold].

Although Pharaoh regarded Joseph's interpretation of his dream as already having been fulfilled (*Ramban v. 36*), nevertheless, since abundance was not a novelty in fertile Egypt, it was only with the advent of the famine that Joseph's interpretation of the dream was absolutely verified (*Ramban v. 27*).

ויהי רעב בכל-הארצות ובכל-ארץ מצרים היתה לחם — *There was famine in all the lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.*

— From their stored-up food, for Joseph had prepared them for the impending famine (*Rashbam; R' Bachya; Abarbanel*).

Unlike the other lands which had not experienced abundance and, accordingly, could not store up surplus crops, in Egypt *there was bread* from the grain that Joseph had stored away. However, the land itself was not yielding new crops even in Egypt (*Mizrachi to v. 50*).

Sforno in v. 3 interprets that this period of both famine and plenty — hunger in other countries and food in Egypt — was symbolized in Pharaoh's dream by the lean cows standing alongside the fat cows for a while.

There was famine in the all the lands — that is, only in the lands adjacent to Egypt; other lands, however, were unaffected — otherwise how could faraway countries have survived? Thus have the Sages said in the *Midrash*, 'The famine raged in three lands: Phoenicia, Arabia and Palestine' (*Ramban*).

[The Sages in the *Talmud*, however, interpret that the famine was worldwide. See v. 57.]

55. ונתרעב בליאך מצרים — *When [lit. and] all the land of Egypt hungered.*

— For all the stored grain rotted except that which Joseph had stored up (*Rashi*).

Cf. *Tanchuma*: All the grain they had at home rotted — even the bread in their baskets became moldy; and even those individuals who stored up food went hungry (*Oznaim LaTorah*).

According to *Lekach Tov*, they felt the shortage so acutely, 'Because the very knowledge that there is famine whets the appetite; a man who normally eats one measure of bread, eats three measures.'

This occurred in the second year of the famine when even Egypt itself felt the hunger of the famine (*R' Bachya*).

— ויצעק העם אל-פרעה ללחם [And] the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread.

Complaining to the monarch that Joseph was making an unreasonable demand upon them [see below].

ויאמר פרעה לכל-מצרים לכו אל יוסף אשר יאמר לכם מעשוי — *So Pharaoh said to all of Egypt, 'Go to Joseph.*

41 There was famine in all the lands, but in all the land
55 of Egypt there was bread.

⁵⁵ When all the land of Egypt hungered, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread. So Pharaoh said to all of Egypt, "Go to Joseph. Whatever he tells you, do."

Whatever he tells you [you shall] do.'

— He is in full charge over all matters; his word is final (*R' Bachya; Abarbanel*).

¶§ Joseph demands that the Egyptians be circumcised.

[Pharaoh had to give them this firm order because] Joseph demanded of them to [first] be circumcised [or else he would not provide them with grain]. When they came to Pharaoh and told him what Joseph demanded, he asked them, 'Why did you yourselves not store up grain? Did he not constantly resound the warning that years of famine were coming? [If you were neglectful, why do you now cry to me?]

'We gathered in a lot,' they answered, 'but it rotted.'

'If so,' Pharaoh retorted, 'then go to Joseph; whatever he orders you, do. See, he decreed about the produce [that it rot] and it rotted, what if he decrees about us and we will all die?' (*Rashi*; bracketed additions are from *Tanchuma*; see *comm.* to 45:1). ^[1]

¶§ What was Joseph's purpose in demanding that the Egyptian masses undergo circumcision?

□ As *Yafeh Toar* observes, the difficulty is compounded by the following: (a) circumcision is not among the commandments incumbent upon non-Jews; (b) since the Egyptians still served idols, their circumcision would have no ef-

ficacy (see *Nedarim* 41a); (c) circumcision of a gentile without ritual immersion is of no value.

Yafeh Toar answers that Joseph's intent was not to convert the Egyptians or to have them perform a *mitzvah*. Rather, in his prophetic wisdom, Joseph was preparing for the eventual descent of his brothers to Egypt. He knew that gentiles mock Jews because they are circumcised. By making the Egyptians circumcise themselves, he made it impossible for them to ridicule the circumcised Jews.

My father שליט"א compares this with Joseph's scheme in 47:21 whereby Joseph ordered the Egyptians to relocate *en masse*, for the specific purpose of removing the possible reproach that might be leveled against his brothers, viz. that they were aliens, since the Egyptians themselves now became strangers and aliens in their own land.

□ According to *Rambam* [*Melachim* 10:8], the descendants of Keturah — [who intermingled with the Egyptians (*Tosefos HaRosh*)] — were obligated to circumcise themselves. Perhaps it was to include this segment of the population that Joseph ordered everyone to undergo circumcision. (See *Torah Sheleimah* note #138).

□ Another suggestion advanced is that circumcision reduces the libido and causes one to exercise more moderation especially in times of famine (see *Kli Yakar*).

□ In a Kabbalistic vein, *R' Munk* explains that Joseph's demand is related to the phenomenon that wheat stored by him remained edible, while that of the

1. *Meam Loez* cites *Bircas Avraham* to the effect that the Egyptians responded to Joseph's demand with such reluctance because they were familiar with Joseph's background. They knew that Simeon and Levi had tricked the city of Shechem into submitting to circumcision, and on the third day, when the Shechemites were weak and sick from the operation, the brothers at-

פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ וַיִּפְתַּח יוֹסֵף אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם וַיִּשְׁבֵּר לַמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּחֲזֹק הָרָעָב

מִקֵּץ
מֵאֵל

Egyptians rotted. Some commentators, such as *R' Bachya* and *Maharal*, explain that Joseph attributed this to the benefits of the Covenant of circumcision. Indeed, as the history of Israel demonstrates, this Covenant confers enduring life and possessions on its adherents. Accordingly, Joseph held that performing the sign of the Covenant would be an antidote against degeneration and a guarantee of longevity and survival. (The usual Aramaic translation for the word בְּרִית is קְנָמָא, as in *Onkelos* on 17:11. It means *conservation, permanent existence*). The *Shelah* holds that in the depravity of Egyptian morals Joseph saw the initial cause of the Divine punishments which were to be inflicted on the land of Egypt. The Torah itself confirms this view in Chap. 18 of *Leviticus* where it warns Israel against bringing about its own destruction by imitating the immorality of Egypt. Right from his accession to power, Joseph wanted to strike at the root of this evil and to lead the Egyptians to a healthier, purer moral life. He hoped to do so by having them undergo circumcision, which has the effect [as noted above] of diminishing the sexual drive. The Egyptians obeyed Joseph as long as he ruled over them, but they abandoned the practice very shortly after his death (*Aruch* s.v. מל).

56. וַהֲרָעָב הָיָה עַל כָּל-פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ —
When [lit. and] the famine spread [lit. was] over all the face of the earth.

The phrase literally reads: *And the famine was upon all the face(s) of the earth.* *Rashi* explains that in this context, 'faces' (or prominent)

of the earth refers to the well-to-do people. [Cf. פְּנֵי הָעִיר in 33:18].

— The famine spread and struck the wealthy with particular force (*R' Meyuchas*).

This follows the *Midrash* which explains that the famine commenced with the wealthy who are called the פְּנֵי 'faces' of the earth. When a man is wealthy he has a happy disposition [lit. 'face'] for seeking out his friends; but when he is impoverished he does not show himself to his neighbors for he is embarrassed.

According to *R' Bachya*, wealthy people are called פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ, the 'faces' of the earth, 'since everyone's face is directed toward them.'

Divrei David explains that *Rashi* departs from the simple meaning — *and the famine raged throughout the entire land* — because were that the intended meaning, the verse should have read: וַהֲרָעָב הָיָה עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ, *and the famine was upon the face [i.e. surface] of all the land.* Since the verse reads *עַל כָּל פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ*, upon all the face of the earth, *Rashi* pursues the Midrashic interpretation.

Additionally, this exegesis that the 'face' of all the land refers to the wealthy whom the famine affected, rather than to the surface of the land itself, is inspired by the fact that following the latter interpretation this verse would be superfluous. We already know from verses 44 and 55 that the famine raged throughout the land (*Devek Tov*).

The famine is said to have affected the wealthy because poor people are accustomed to hunger, and take the suffering in stride. For the wealthy, however, it is different — they are unfamiliar with hunger, and they suffer from it most (*Yalkut Yehudah*).

The poor people did not suffer so much at first because they ate the moldy bread. The wealthy people who are accustomed to dine on delicacies felt the

tacked the city and massacred its inhabitants (34:25). The Egyptians were afraid that Joseph was demanding that they submit to circumcision because he had a similar plan in mind.

"Foolish people" laughed Pharaoh. "You think that Joseph has to resort to such tricks? Who do you think made all our private stores of grain rot? You have no idea of this man's power. If he wishes, he can decree that we all die. You have no other choice but to do as he bids!"

41 ⁵⁶ When the famine spread over all the face of the
56 earth, Joseph opened all the containers and sold
provisions to Egypt. And the famine became severe

deprivation most acutely (Oznaim laTorah).

Akeidas Yitzchak suggests, to the contrary, that in the literal sense the verse is telling us that the famine reached such proportions that the whole 'face of the earth' was dry and parched; even the cattle had no pasture.

Ramban similarly maintains that this verse magnifies the severity of the famine. He explains that contextually the implication of the verse is that Joseph did not open his storehouses until those of the people were completely deleted. When they first complained to Pharaoh (v. 55), however, he ignored them, because people tend to cry out as soon as there is the least shortage.

וַיִּפְתָּח יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם — [And] Joseph opened all the containers.

The passage literally reads: *And Joseph opened all that had within them*. The commentators agree that the phrase is clearly elliptical [מִקְרָא קָצֵר, a 'shortened' passage, i.e., a passage in which omitted words are to be understood] and the words *storehouses* and *grain* are implied. The translation follows *Rashi* who explains that the verse should be understood as *Onkelos* paraphrases it: *Joseph opened all the storehouses in which there was grain*.

[It may also be that the implied object of Joseph's opening was storehouses which contained the *לֶחֶם, bread*, that the Egyptians requested in v. 55].

According to *Sforno*, Joseph opened the granaries in order to reassure the populace that he had

ample supplies for them and there was no cause for alarm.

It is obvious that Joseph did not open all the granaries simultaneously, or else he would have lost personal control of them and a great loss would have resulted. Rather, the intent is that he ordered them opened as needed (*R' Shmuel ben Chofni Gaon*).

וַיִּשְׁבֶּר לְמִצְרַיִם — And [he] sold [provisions] to Egypt [i.e. to the Egyptians (Targum Yonasan; R' Saadiah Gaon)].

I.e., he sold to Egyptians before selling to others (*Tur*).

The verb *שָׁבַר* can denote either selling or buying. Here it signifies *selling* while in 42:2 it signifies *buying*. The term is not used exclusively of trading in grain [as the noun form *שֶׁבֶר, grain*, would lead one to believe] for we find the term used also of trading in wine and milk [*Isaiah 55:1*] (*Rashi*).

Rashi thus teaches us that although the verb *שָׁבַר* almost invariably occurs in reference to the trading of *grain* — as in our verse where the word *שֶׁבֶר, grain*, is the implied object being sold; it by no means is used exclusively for that. It is not a denominative verb formed from *שֶׁבֶר, grain*, but its meaning is extended to apply to trading in any food, or as its use in *Isaiah* makes clear, to such specific articles of food as wine and milk (*Rashbam; Tzeidah laDerech*).

Radak explains that food is called *shever* [lit. 'break'] because it 'breaks' hunger. Hence the verb *shavar* refers to trading in food.

Haamek Davar maintains that the verb *shavar* [lit. *break*] refers to selling food in small ['broken'] quantities — rationing.^[1]

1. Cf. *R' Hirsch* who also explains the verb as referring to sales in measured quantities.

He explains that Joseph should sell only quantities sufficient for the immediate requirements of each family. Only in this way could he prevent speculative buying and hoarding. As our Sages remark, people had to present themselves personally; nothing was sold to slaves, or

מקץ מא/ב
בארץ מצרים: וכל הארץ באו מצרימה
לשבר אל-יוסף בייחזק הרעב בכל-
א הארץ: וירא יעקב כי יש שבר במצרים

[And] the famine became severe in the land of Egypt.

— Even in all kinds of food, in addition to bread (*Sforno*).

They ate, but were not satiated (*R' Bachya*).

57. וכל הארץ באו מצרימה לשבר. אל יוסף — And all [inhabitants of] the earth came to Egypt unto Joseph to buy provisions.

And all the earth refers specifically to the people of the three countries adjacent to Egypt (*Ramban* v. 54 following the *Midrash*).

According to the Sages in *Pesachim* 119a, however, the implication is that people of all the countries of the whole world came to buy grain in Egypt. Joseph accordingly amassed all the silver and gold of the world and stored it in Egypt. This formed the treasure

that the Israelites later took with them when they left Egypt.¹¹ *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 11 derives from this verse that Joseph was one of the ten kings who, in effect, reigned throughout the entire world.

The Hebrew of this verse literally reads: And all the land (or: earth) came to Egypt to buy to Joseph. *Rashi* maintains that for comprehension the word order must be transposed [as in our translation] as if it read: to Egypt to Joseph to buy. For if one were to explain the passage in the order the words are written, it should have stated: לשבר מן יוסף, to buy from [rather than to] Joseph.

In its simplest sense, the verse — structured as it is — sequentially informs us first that all the earth came to Egypt after which it states their reason for coming — to buy provisions, and for this purpose their destination was specifically to Joseph (*Ibn Caspi*).

— For the famine had become severe in all the earth.

— I.e. in the lands adjacent to

a man could send fifty slaves; each person was allowed to bring only one beast of burden with him, and everybody had to come to Joseph. He attended the sales personally, not depending on subordinate officials, but coming into direct contact with the hungry householders who came to buy. That is why the following chapter says in v. 6: יוסף הוא, Joseph, he was the viceroy over the land, he was the provider. Although he was the שליט, the viceroy, he himself was the משביר, the provider.

These necessary and wise methods brought about all that ensued. Only because each purchaser had to meet Joseph did it happen that he himself came into contact with his brothers. The repeated description of the famine's severity gives the cause for all these precautions.

1. That Egypt was to amass all this wealth is perceived in the *Zohar* and Kabbalistic literature as one of the Providential reasons that Egypt was subjected to this famine.

In addition to the fact that the sale of Joseph and ensuing famine were the vehicles whereby Jacob and his family were brought down to Egypt to begin the exile foretold to Abraham in chapter 15, the famine itself was God's way, in a sense, of providing the cure before the disease.

When God decreed to Abraham that his offspring would be enslaved, He promised him that afterward they will leave with great wealth [15:14]. At the time Joseph arrived in Egypt, however, it was a poor country and had very little wealth. Providence therefore arranged for a wide-spread famine in which everyone would have to come to Egypt to purchase grain. As a result of this, Egypt would become fabulously wealthy in anticipation of the Israelites' descent.

41 in the land of Egypt.³⁷ All the earth came to Egypt
57 unto Joseph to buy provisions, for the famine had
become severe in all the earth.

42 ¹Jacob perceived that there were provisions in
1

Egypt [see v. 4] (Midrash; Ramban); or the whole world (the Sages in the Talmud).

It was only after Joseph ascertained that the famine had become

severe in the other lands as well that he allowed non-Egyptians to come and purchase grain. Until then, as noted, he restricted sales to Egyptians (Akediah; cf. Tur).

XLII

1. The brothers in Egypt.

It is now in the second year of the famine (*Seder Olam*). Although his family still has a supply of provisions, Jacob is concerned. He dispatches his sons to Egypt.

וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב בִּי יִשְׁשָׁכָר בְּמִצְרַיִם —
[And] Jacob perceived [lit. saw] that
there were provisions [lit. purchase]
in Egypt.

The commentators discuss the connotation of the verb *saw* in this context:

— He literally *saw* travelers bearing wheat. When he asked them whence they were coming they replied from Egypt. This is what he meant by saying [next verse], Behold I have *heard*, etc. (Radak;

however, comp. Rashi in footnote who maintains that prophetic perception is meant).¹¹

According to Ibn Ezra the expression *saw* is synonymous with *heard*. Since the five senses originate in the brain the verb describing the perception made by one sense is often substituted for another. Compare, for example [27:27]: רָאָה רִיחַ בְּנִי [where *see* figuratively means *smell*]; Ecclesiastes 11:7: *sweet is the light* [where 'sweet' must be allegorical because sweetness cannot refer to light]. [Cf. also Exodus 20:15: 'Saw (i.e. heard) the thunderings.'] Here, too, *saw* is to be understood to mean *heard* as in v. 2. [Comp. Rambam, *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:46.]

'See' in this context does not refer to visual, but mental perception [lit. 'see-

1. Rashi pursues what appears to be the Midrashic interpretation:

"Where did Jacob 'see' [that there were provisions]? Surely he did not 'see' it but he *heard* it [from travelers returning from Egypt], as he said [v. 27]: 'Behold I have heard ...'

What then is meant by *and Jacob saw*? It means that he saw in a holy *ispaklaria** that there was *shever* (provisions) [or *sever* (hope) (see below)] for him in Egypt. However, it was not a literal prophecy informing him specifically that it was Joseph."

According to the view of most commentators Rashi refers to the Midrash that in-

* [Aramaic אִסְפַּקְלָרְיָא, lit. *glass* — 'mirror' or 'lens'. The Sages use this simile to describe prophecy. Since the human mind does not have the faculty directly to perceive the Divine, the prophet's perception is likened to having been seen through a dull mirror or lens. Figuratively the clarity of a prophecy varies with the quality and cleanliness of the *ispaklaria* [sometimes vowelized *aspaklaria*]. Of all the prophets only Moses is said to have prophesied as if through a perfectly clear *ispaklaria*. See *Yevamos* 49b and *comm.* there. See also Rashi and *comm.* to Numbers 12:6.]

ing of the heart']. Proof of this is that Jacob said [v. 2], Behold I heard rather than, Behold I saw (R' Bachya).

שָׁכָר — Provisions.

This translation reflects the contextual sense of the word. The term *shever* is explained at length in 40:56.

Midrashically [see footnote] the word *shever* is equated with *sever*, hope. Kabbalistically, the word *shever* is used in this context to denote *provisions*, in-

stead of the more common terms אֵכָל, food, or קֶרֶן, grain, because *shever* also has the connotation of ruin; exile [see Isaiah 51:19]. This latter interpretation also alludes to Jacob's foresight in recognizing that their descent into Egypt would fulfill the exile foretold to Abraham. Thus through the ambiguity of the term, Jacob was referring both to the hope of obtaining provisions, as well as to the calamity awaiting him and his family in Egypt (R' Bachya). There is also an opinion that *shever* means in-

terprets שָׁכָר as *sever*, hope and the meaning of *Rashi* is that Jacob saw that there was 'hope' for him in Egypt. A verbatim translation of *Bereishis Rabbah* 91:6 from which *Rashi* presumably derives this interpretation follows:

Now Jacob saw that there was *shever* in Egypt. Was then Jacob in Egypt that Scripture says that he saw that there was *shever* in Egypt? Did he not say to his sons, 'Behold I have heard that there is *shever* in Egypt?' Since the day that Joseph was stolen, however, the Holy Spirit departed from Joseph so that he saw yet did not see, heard yet did not hear [i.e. his prophetic perception was imperfect]. Now, why does it not say 'Jacob saw there was קֶרֶן, grain,' or 'there was אֵכָל, food,' but there was '*shever*' [provisions; rations]? — Read not *shever* but *sever* [hope]:

"Jacob saw in the *ispaklaria* that his hope was in Egypt. — Who was this? — Joseph."

Thus, the commentators explain, since the verses are inconsistent in their use of *seeing* and *hearing*, and the term *shever* rather than *grain* is used, *Rashi* follows the Midrashic interpretation that Jacob was privy to a *quasi-prophetic revelation* by which he 'saw' that hope awaited him in Egypt. Unknown to Jacob, the revelation referred to Joseph.

[Since the vision was somewhat unclear and since Jacob would not boast about matters of prophecy, when relating it to his sons in v. 2, he described his perception as 'hearing' rather than 'seeing' — and at the same time shielded this prophetic intimation from his children who probably understood his remark in the literal sense (see *Yafeh Toar* and *Bereishis Rabbah* 91:1).]

[What is difficult, however, according to the commentators mentioned above, is why *Rashi* — who is usually so clear in his comments — does not state clearly that his exegesis is based on the premise that the *Midrash* interprets the unvocalized word שָׁכָר, *shever* as if it were to be read *sever*, 'hope', rather than in its contextual sense of the sale of the provisions.

[Possibly *Rashi* prefers not to depart from the literal, contextual meaning of *shever* (spelled with a *shin*) meaning *provisions*, omitting the reference to the reading of *sever*, hope. He utilizes the *Midrash* only to explain the surprising term 'saw' instead of 'heard,' but he blends the Midrashic exegesis into the plain meaning of the verse. Thus he interprets that Jacob saw in an *ispaklaria* that there were provisions in Egypt.]

[In any case, *Rashi* is providing us with a very fundamental premise in the workings of prophecy. A prophet does not always comprehend the whole message of his prophecy; he is allowed to perceive only that portion of the Divine message which God wishes to reveal to him. In this case, though Jacob was granted the quasi-prophetic insight that there was *shever* for him in Egypt, he was not granted the knowledge that this would involve Joseph.]

interpretation [see Judges 7:15], and that the connotation is that Jacob perceived that the interpretation of Joseph's dream would be fulfilled in Egypt (Shaarei Aharon).

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לְבָנָיו — So [lit. and] Jacob said to his sons.

All his sons were married by this time, and no longer at Jacob's table, as we can infer from the case of Judah who left home shortly after the sale of Joseph [38:1]. Cf. also the reference to their households in v. 19 below. It is to the brothers' credit that they all responded obediently to their father's call (Abarbanel).

לָמָּה תִּהְיוּ מְבִיטִים — Why do you make yourselves conspicuous? [lit. make yourselves seen]

Rashi offers several explanations:

Although we are not yet short of food, why do you show yourselves in the eyes of the children of Ishmael and Esau as having plenty [to eat]? [Such behavior will bring their envy and ill will (Ta'anis 10b, upon which this interpretation is based)].¹¹

The commentators wonder why the Talmud speaks of envy on the part of the families of Ishmael and Esau, but not of the Canaanite neighbors of Jacob.

— Ramban suggests that people from Ishmael and Esau might pass through Canaan on their way to Egypt and, seeing that Jacob had food, they would avail themselves of Jacob's hospitality coming to him for free meals. The result would be that his resources would be depleted quickly. Jacob therefore cautioned that they be more prudent with the provisions they had.

— Mizrahi postulates that the land of Canaan did have food; the shortage had affected only the southern lands of Ishmael and Esau who would seek to take advantage of Jacob's apparent wealth and generosity.

Maharsha (Ta'anis 10b) offers that many Canaanites, too, lacked food, but relatives are more likely than strangers to feel envy. The children of Ishmael and Esau, as Jacob's cousins and nephews, fit into this category.

— Thus, 'why' in this context is not a question, but an exclamation of incredulity: How can you make yourselves conspicuous at such a time! Furthermore, that Jacob's family still had grain at that time is evident from the fact that the brothers did not go on their own volition until Jacob exhorted them. This occurred in the second year of the famine as indicated by 45:6 (Mizrahi).

Rashi continues: It appears to me however that the expression simply means [why should you cause yourselves to be looked upon? (Divrei David)] — why should

1. The context of Ta'anis 10b from which Rashi cites this interpretation is a discussion of how one should conduct himself when going to a place where the local residents are fasting on account of some calamity:

"The Rabbis have taught: ... If one journeys from a place where they do not fast to a place where they do, he should fast with them ... If he forgot and ate and drank, let him not make it obvious in public [and appear like a groom among mourners, thereby arousing their envy (Rashi ad. loc.)], nor may he indulge in delicacies [and reason that since he already ate something insignificant he might as well eat more (ibid.)], as it is written: Why do you make yourselves conspicuous? Jacob conveyed thereby to his sons, 'When you are fully sated do not show yourselves [that you have much of grain (ibid.)] either before Esau or Ishmael so that they should not envy you.'"

[Accordingly, the brothers went to Egypt only to avoid being conspicuous before the descendants of Esau and Ishmael who were starving at the time (ibid.).]

הִנֵּה שְׁמַעְתִּי כִּי יֵשׁ-שָׂבֵר בְּמִצְרַיִם רָדוּ-
שָׁמָּה וְשִׁבְרוּ-לָנוּ מִשָּׁם וְנַחֲיָה וְלֹא נָמוּת:

מקץ
מב/ב

everyone look at you and wonder why you do not seek food before your stock is depleted? From others I heard [Tosafos ad. loc. s.v. למה] cites the following interpretation in the name of a Midrash] that it has the meaning of weakness: Why should you become weakened through hunger? Similar to this is Proverbs 11:25 וְיִמְרֶה גַם הוּא יֹרֵא, he that satiates [others] will himself also be satiated.¹¹

Sforno renders: Why do you look at one another — each one waiting for the other to go? Cf. the Talmudic proverb [Eruvin 3a]: קְרִיכָה רְשׁוּתָּי לֹא חֲמִיקָא וְלֹא קְרִיכָא, 'A pot supervised by two chefs is neither hot nor cold' [for each relies upon the other].

R' Hirsch renders similarly. He explains that Jacob correctly assumed that only individual householders could purchase rations in Egypt — one could not buy on behalf of another; everyone had to appear personally. The sons apparently believed otherwise, and looked

at one another, each waiting for one to go on behalf of them all. But Jacob deduced the truth of the rumor from the urgency of the conditions and said, 'Why are you looking at each other? You must all go down yourselves.'

Heidenheim rejects the above interpretations, maintaining that the hispaal [reflexive] form תִּתְרָאוּ does not refer to one person looking at another, but to each person observing his own appearance as in Rashi's interpretation.

Tur cites an interpretation similar to Sforno's, but explains תִּתְרָאוּ as alluding to contention; warfare; as in II Kings 14:8. They argued with one another regarding who should go to Egypt, so Jacob reprimanded them: Why do you contend with one another? (So Ibn Ezra).

Targum Yonasan relates it to the root ירא meaning fear, and renders: 'Why do you fear going down to Egypt?' [Karnei Or notes, however, that according to this interpretation the Hebrew should have read וְיִתְרָאוּ or וְיִתְרָאוּ] ¹²

According to the Midrash, Jacob's admonition was: Do not travel with food in your hands lest you cause ill

1. The commentators on Rashi differ as to which of the interpretations the proof verse from Proverbs supports. According to some views, most notably Mizrahi, it appears to support the first explanation: Rashi cited the proof verse after mentioning the alternate interpretation to emphasize the contrast between them. Thus, Rashi seemingly takes תִּתְרָאוּ [lit. make yourselves seen] to be of the root רוה [satiate] as if it were written תִּתְרָאוּ [why do you make yourselves appear satiated?]. The letters ו and א frequently interchange [cf. for example Psalms 91:16: וְאֶרְוָה=וְאֶרְוֶה; Job 10:16: וְרָאָה=וְרָאוּ]. A similar form of the root רוה occurring with an א is the word יורא is Prov. 11:25 as quoted by Rashi.

According to others [see Chizkuni], a proof verse must be taken to support the immediately preceding interpretation — why should you become weakened? Therefore in Proverbs רוה means satiated while in our verse it means weakened by hunger, since the word is among those that have opposite meanings depending upon the context. Comp. רוש: to fatten/to remove ashes; שורש: root/uproot; שבר: buy/sell.

See also Maharsha ad. loc. s.v. א"ל יעקב who defends the latter view against Mizrahi and maintains that יורא with an א means weaken, and explains the verse in Proverbs accordingly.

R' David Feinstein contends that the very structure of the verses in Proverbs strongly favors the interpretation that this stich means the opposite of sated. In Proverbs, half of each verse contrasts with the connotation of the other half. Therefore, since the verse begins with a reference to satiety, the word מְרִיכָה in its second stich can only mean the opposite. He wonders why the commentators ad. loc. — including Rashi — do not mention this. [See Sefer HaZikaron and Bertinoro who indeed maintain that the verse in Proverbs must be interpreted according to the third interpretation cited by Rashi.]

feeling, and [as you enter Egypt] do not all enter through one gate for fear of the evil eye [which someone might cast through envy that one man should be blessed with ten such sons.]

2. נִאמַר — And he said.

[The repetition of *and he said* implies a renewed plea. Apparently Jacob's sons did not take his hint. He found it necessary to instruct them explicitly.]

הִנֵּה שָׁמַעְתִּי כִּי יֵשֶׁבֶר בְּמִצְרַיִם —
Behold I have heard that there are provisions for sale in Egypt.

[See above v. 1 s.v. נִאמַר.]

הָרָדָה — Go down there.

Jacob did not use the verb לָכַד, *go*, but הָרָדָה [go down] thereby hinting at the 210 years [the numerical value of the word הָרָדָה (ר=200; ד=4; ה=6)] they would be enslaved in Egypt (*Rashi*).

[God informed Abraham at the Covenant Between the Parts (15:13) that his descendants would be exiled for 400 years. The 400 year duration of the exile was reckoned from Isaac's birth. The actual period they were enslaved in Egypt, however, from Jacob's arrival there until the Exodus, was 210 years, corresponding to the numerical equivalent of הָרָדָה. (See calculations in *Rashi* to 15:13 s.v. מָהָר שָׁנָה p. 527).]

The Sages derive this exegesis from the

fact that telling one to 'descend' is an expression with demeaning spiritual connotations, and one which Jacob would have avoided unless he had a specific intention in using it. Even though Scriptural narrative frequently uses 'descent' to describe one who journeys from *Eretz Yisrael* — the 'highest of all the lands' [see 13:1] — to Egypt [see 12:10] as in v. 3 below, it should be avoided in direct speech since it is demeaning to the one being addressed. Accordingly Jacob would never have used the expression had he not been alluding to the 210 years of bondage (*Gur Aryeh; Bertinoro*).

Since one's own field supplied one's needs in ancient times, it was regarded a misfortune to purchase grain from another. The Midrash derived this from Jacob's charge to his sons: 'Go down to Egypt' — implying that one who must purchase grain from the market has gone down in status.

On two successive occasions, here and in 43:2, Jacob insisted that his sons go to Egypt. He who had so much hoped to live peacefully in Canaan — see *comm.* to נִשְׁבַּע וַיָּקֶבֶץ (37:1) — was now compelled by necessity to indicate descent into the land of Exile. Thus, the Divine Will progressively comes to be realized despite the reluctance of people (*R' Munk*).

וַיָּבֹאוּ לָנוּ מִשָּׁם — And purchase for us from there.

Here the verb שָׁבַר means purchase (*Rashi* 41:56).

From there — rather than from the local traders who charge exorbitant prices (*Malbim*).

Jacob did not specify that they

2. Cf. *R' Munk* who writes that Jacob noticed his sons' apprehension about making this journey. They looked at one another with worry and embarrassment. When Abraham traveled to Egypt to escape famine, he went through severe anguish. In Isaac's time of famine, God forbade him to go to Egypt. And as for themselves, the very thought of going to Egypt reminded them that they had sold Joseph into a slavery that had Egypt as its final destination. Were they now to go there, would not Egypt again become a scene of adversity for the patriarchal family? Furthermore, they had a premonition that Egypt would become the land of exile announced long before to Abraham. Jacob sought to calm their fears by telling them (v. 2): *Behold I have heard that (despite everything) there is hope in Egypt; go down there.* [As noted in v. 2, הָרָדָה, *go down*, has the numerical value of 210 and portends that the actual enslavement in Egypt was to last 210 years instead of the 400 years announced to Abraham]. Despite the trials and persecutions of the exile, we shall survive."

מקץ
מב/ג-ד
ג וַיָּרְדוּ אֶחָיוּסָף עִשָּׂרָה לְשֹׁכֵר בָּר
ד מִמַּצְרַיִם: וְאֶת־בְּנֵימִין אָחִי יוֹסֵף לֹא־
שָׁלַח יַעֲקֹב אֶת־אָחִיו כִּי אָמַר פֶּן־יִקְרָאנוּ

purchase grain but used the more ambiguous term *shever* since, as noted in v. 1, the term *shever* carried an additional connotation of the calamity [lit. *breaking*] – exile – that he knew they would experience with their descent there. This is also the connotation of *and we will live and not die*, for despite the numerous future exiles the children of Israel were to endure, Jacob knew they would not be annihilated, but would thrive (R' Bachya).

וְנָחִיָּה וְלֹא נָמוּת – That [lit. *and*] *we may live and [we may] not die*.

– When our present supplies are depleted. As noted, at that time they still had provisions (*Maharsha, Taanis 10b s.v. עָשׂוּ*; see Rashi in footnote to v. 1).

Jacob was cautioning them to be frugal with the meager amount they had left, and purchase additional supplies lest they die when their stock became depleted ... The correct interpretation appears to be, however, that their provisions had by this time been nearly exhausted and they were in mortal danger unless they quickly replenished their supplies (*Ramban v. 1*).

That we may live – not luxuriously, but that we may buy enough food to keep alive *and not die* of hunger (*Sforno*).

3. וַיָּרְדוּ אָחִי יוֹסֵף עִשָּׂרָה – So [lit. *and*] *Joseph's brothers – ten (of them) – went down*.

– Not because they were in dire need at that time, but to avoid appearing conspicuous before the descendants of Esau who were distressed and hungry (*Rashi Sotah 10b s.v. וְלֹא תִרְאוּ לָמָּה תִּקְרָאוּ*; see *Rashi and Ramban* above).

Why did all ten brothers have to go?

All had to go because the Egyptians would not sell any one more food than was needed for a single household lest the purchaser trade in grain as often happens during a famine (*Sforno*).¹¹

And as *Abarbanel* explains, by this time each of the sons was married [so each had to go individually to acquire sufficient rations for his own household.]

The phraseology of this passage – *the brothers of Joseph – ten* is somewhat redundant and *Rashi*, basing his comment on *Midrash Tanchuma*, elicits the implication of the expressions:

– They are described as *Joseph's brothers* rather than as Jacob's sons, to imply that they regretted having sold him and were resolved to act as brothers

1. The Midrashim record that Joseph had promulgated several decrees in anticipation of his brothers' arrival:

a) No slave may enter Egypt to buy grain. [This was in order to ensure that the brothers themselves would come]; b) no one might come with two donkeys. [This was to avoid hoarding by individuals and assure that all of the brothers would have to come]; c) no one may enter without registering his own name, his father's and his grandfather's. Furthermore Joseph ordered that the lists of everyone who entered the gates of Egypt be brought to him daily.

Now when Joseph's brothers came to Egypt, they did not all enter through the same gate [see *Midrash* cited end of v. 1, and *Rashi* to v. 12 s.v. עָרְכָן]. When Joseph saw the names 'Reuben son of Jacob, son of Isaac', 'Simeon son of Jacob, son of Isaac', etc. listed on the various gatekeepers' lists, he realized that his brothers had arrived. So he sent his son Menasheh to watch where they were going, and he found them walking about the various markets

may live and not die.”³ So Joseph’s brothers — ten of them — went down to buy grain from Egypt. ⁴ But Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, Jacob did not send along with his brothers, for he said, “Lest disaster befall

toward him and secure his freedom from slavery at any cost.

— Inasmuch as it is stated [v. 4] that Benjamin stayed behind, we know that ten brothers went; why is the number mentioned? It implies that in regard to their feelings of brotherhood [i.e., their role as אחי יוסף, *brothers of Joseph*] they were עשירה, *ten* different individuals, inasmuch as they did not have the same degree of love or hate for him; they were unanimous, however, in their purpose of לשבר בר ממצרים, *to buy grain from Egypt* (Rashi; cf. *Midrash*).

4. וְאֵת בְּנִימִין אָחִי יוֹסֵף וְכוּ' — But [lit. and] Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, Jacob did not send along with his brothers. [Or: But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin along with his brothers.]

Joseph’s brother, i.e., his full brother from the same mother and father. Because of what had happened to Joseph, Jacob was afraid to send Benjamin with them (Radak).

It was destined from Above that Benjamin — who had not participated in the sale of Joseph — not accompany them so that he would be spared their tribulations in Egypt. Although admittedly he suffered along with them when he joined them on their second trip, he

was compensated for this by having the intense joy of meeting Joseph (Oznaim l’Torah).

פְּרִיזָקְרָאֵנוּ אִסוֹן — ‘Lest disaster befall him’.

— But could not disaster befall him at home? R’ Eliezer ben Yaakov said, We may infer from this that השטן מקטרג בשעת הסכנה, *the Satan accuses in a time of danger* [i.e., there is generally a greater danger on the road than at home, and the Satan maliciously capitalizes upon the traveler’s vulnerability to danger by seizing the opportunity to lay his sins before God so that misfortune should readily befall him while en route] (Rashi).

Jacob’s feared possible consequences of a journey because such dangers as wild beasts and brigands are more prevalent on the road than near home where one can protect himself from the elements. In general, one must avoid places of danger. Even a righteous man should not rely on his righteousness and hope for a possible miracle, for even if a miracle is wrought for him, it will be deducted from his merits (*Shabbos* 32a; cf. footnote to 32:11 (p. 1422)). This was the reason for Jacob’s apprehension (Radak).

Why should Jacob have been more apprehensive about Benjamin than any

and streets, Joseph had them brought before him and immediately he recognized them, but they did not recognize him.

According to another Midrash, when Joseph learned that his brothers were in Egypt, he ordered all the granaries closed except for one, and he left orders that he be notified when his brothers appear.

Several days passed and they did not come. So he sent for them and they were found in a street of prostitutes where they had gone to search for Joseph, fearing, because he was so handsome, that he might have been forcefully placed in a brothel.

It was in this way that they were apprehended, and the stage was set for them to be brought to Joseph.

מקץ ה אסון: ויבאו בני ישראל לשבר בתוך
מב-הו הבאים כי-היה הרעב בארץ כנען:
ו יוסף הוא השליט על-הארץ הוא
המשביר לכל-עם הארץ ויבאו אחי

other of his children? Benjamin was no child at this time; he must have already been about thirty years old.

— He was the only remaining child of Rachel, and was therefore irreplaceable (*B'chor Shor*).

[Cf. *Rashi* to 44:29 who quotes Jacob as saying: While Benjamin is with me I find comfort in him for the loss of his mother and his brother; if he should die it will seem to me as though the three of them died on the same day.]

According to *Midrash HaChefetz* cited in *Torah Sheleimah*, Jacob reasoned: It may have been decreed that the sons of Rachel should perish on the road. I sent Joseph on a journey and he did not return; the same might happen to Benjamin if I send him, for their mother, too, died on the road [48:7; comp. *Rashi* to 44:22].⁽¹⁾

The term *לֵשֶׁבֶר*, *lest*, implies a fear that an *undesired event* will take place, while *אולי*, *perhaps*, implies a hope that an event will occur (*HaKsav V'HaKabbalah* to 24:39; 27:12).

אסון — Disaster.

I.e., death (*Ibn Ezra*).

The Talmud [*Kesubos* 30a] defines the term in this context as a general reference to all possible misfortunes, whether acts of God or human violence. As examples, the Sages give attacks by lions and thieves, and cold and heat [see

Proverbs 22:5 and *comm.* there].

ויבאו בני ישראל לשבר בתוך. הבאים — [And] the sons of Israel came to buy provisions, among the arrivals.

— They kept themselves inconspicuous by mingling among the many other arriving purchasers, for Jacob had instructed them to enter the city individually by separate entrances so that the 'evil eye' might not harm them [if they attracted envy] for they were all handsome, strong men (*Rashi*; *Tanchuma*).

According to *Sforno*, the implication of *among the arrivals* is that they traveled in large groups as protection against bandits who would be particularly rampant at a time of famine.

That they are referred to here as *the sons of Israel* in contrast with v. 3 where they were called *Joseph's brothers* is perceived in *Bereishis Rabbasi* to indicate that their father's merit accompanied them, for they were heeding his instructions.

R' Hirsch observes that this is the first time they are described as בני ישראל, *the children of Israel*. This introduction of the new concept of Jewish nationhood is of major significance to the future of mankind,

1. *R' Hirsch* makes the emphatic point that *ויקראו* [*befall*] in our context means *will 'call' him*. Jacob feared that Benjamin might be going in one direction, but something might occur which would figuratively 'call' him away from that direction.

But if *קרא* is a *call*, there must be a 'Caller'. The common translation of the related expression *מקרה* as *happening*, is heathenish. Nothing 'happens' by chance; everything is engineered. Of all the creatures in the universe, only Man has the power of moral free will to decide his actions.

All influences, happy or otherwise, that deflect an object or person from its natural or chosen direction are called *מקרה*, *chance*. But to God, the Cause, there is no chance. To the Great Master of Plans it was not 'chance,' but destiny. [Comp. *R' Hirsch's comm.* to 24:12.]

him." ⁵ So the sons of Israel come to buy provisions among the arrivals, for the famine prevailed in the land of Canaan.

⁶ Now Joseph, he was the viceroy over the land, he was the provider to all the populace. Joseph's

but they were unconscious of it. They saw themselves merely as *בְּנוֹת הַבָּאִים*, part of the overall crowd.^[2]

— However, though they came like other people, they enter Egypt as the moral unit of 'sons of Israel'. In the same role they will later move there, and as 'sons of Israel' they will be redeemed from there (*Akeidah*).

The historic *בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*, *children of Israel*, has already been used in 33:33 to designate the future nation. The title of honor is used at this ignominious juncture because the descent of the brothers into Egypt was of crucial importance for the future of the nation. It comes to remind us that their historic vocation is never lost in the miseries of exile, but it remains preserved in its entirety for the future (*R' Bachya* on 45:28).

בְּיָהוּהָ הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — For the famine prevailed in the land of Canaan.

— Forcing many people to come from Canaan to Egypt to buy provisions (*Radak*).

[I.e., this phrase clarifies the earlier word *הַבָּאִים*, *the arrivals*, by explaining that it refers to the many Canaanites who traveled to Egypt because of the famine.

[It must be remembered that since Egypt was fertile and had never been affected by earlier famines, it was common for people to seek food in Egypt

during times of hunger in their own lands. Abraham and Isaac also looked to Egypt when there were hungers in Canaan. Thus many Canaanites must have flocked to Egypt at this time, and the brothers entered its gates among them (see *Ramban* below).]

וְיוֹסֵף הָאֵלֶּיָּהוּ עַל הָאֶרֶץ הַזֶּה — *Now [lit. and] Joseph he was the viceroy over the land; he was the provider to all the populace [lit. to the people of the land].*

The verse implies that Joseph personally negotiated every transaction, but surely it was beneath his dignity as regent to handle every petty purchase. Therefore the *Rabbis* in the *Midrash* explain that Joseph ordered all the storehouses except one to be closed temporarily, so he would be sure to meet his brothers when they arrived there [see footnote to v. 3] (*Ramban*).

Ramban continues that the plain meaning of our passage is probably that people [i.e., representatives] from all lands came before Joseph. He would question them and then instruct his officials regarding how much to sell each locale and city. It was therefore necessary for the Canaanites, including the brothers, to appear before Joseph so he could

2. Talmud Yerushalmi [*Berachos* 7:3] derives from our verse that matters of holiness (e.g. *Kaddish*, *Kedushah*, *Barchu*, Reading of the Torah, Priestly Benediction, etc.) may not be recited in a quorum of less than ten men:

It is written here: *The sons [lit. children] of Israel*, and in *Levit. 22:32* it is written *And I will be hallowed among the children of Israel*. Just as *children of Israel* written here refers to ten, so does *children of Israel* written there refer to ten. From this analogy we learn that matters of holiness may not be recited in a group of less than ten.

[In the Babylonian Talmud (*Megillah* 23b), this law is derived from other verses. See comm. to *Levit. ibid.* and *Torah Temimah*.]

וַיֹּסֶף וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָאֲפִים אֶרְצָה: וַיֵּרָא
 יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו וַיִּכְרָם וַיִּתְּנָפֶר אֲלֵיהֶם
 וַיִּדְבֹּר אֹתָם קָשׁוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מֵאֵין
 בָּאתֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְשָׂבֶר־אֶכֶל:

מקץ
 מב/ו

determine the amounts he would allocate to their country. This group was the first to arrive from Canaan [see *Ramban* to v. 9] and represented the entire country. *Ramban* to v. 9 surmises that the brothers may have been the very first arrivals from Canaan.

This follows *Radak* who adds that the term *משביר* is causative — he did not personally sell, but instructed his officials to sell, after personally interviewing each purchaser. Joseph insisted on this arrangement since he knew that his brothers would inevitably be forced to come to Egypt in search of grain because of the severe famine in Canaan.

Others maintain that the emphasis of this verse is to the contrary. Notwithstanding the fact that Joseph was the regent, he was involved in every sale, as the verse informs us. Inasmuch as the royal coffers derived a vast cash income from these sales [see 47:14, 15], he made it a firm rule that no sale could be made without his own seal or written authorization (cf. *Ralbag*; *Sforno*).

Pesikta Zutressa and *Or Ha-Chaim* appear to suggest an even more personal participation by Joseph in each transaction, his purpose being, as noted, to assure that he did not miss seeing his brothers.

וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָאֲפִים אֶרְצָה — *And they bowed to him, faces to the ground.*

I.e., in total prostration upon their faces. The term *השתחווה* implies the stretching out of hands

and feet (*Rashi*; from *Berachos* 34b *Megillah* 22b; *Shevuos* 16b).

[Cf. also *comm.* to 19:1.]

7. Joseph recognizes his brothers.

וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת אֶחָיו וַיִּכְרָם
Joseph saw his brothers and he recognized them.

I.e., as soon as he saw his brothers he recognized them (*Ramban*).

According to *Tz'ror HaMor* the phraseology suggests: At first he was not sure, so he carefully looked at his brothers, i.e. scrutinized them, and then he was sure.

At this point he recognized them collectively as his brothers, but could not yet distinguish them individually [see next verse] (*Ibn Ezra*; *Sforno*).

וַיִּתְּנָפֶר אֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּדְבֹּר אֹתָם קָשׁוֹת
 [lit. and] he acted like a stranger [lit. he made himself a stranger] toward them and spoke with them harshly.

— Fearing that they might recognize him (*Ramban*).

The translation *acted like a stranger* by speaking harshly with them follows *Rashi*, who bases himself upon the *Midrash*.

— By speaking this way he hoped to confuse them and lessen the chance of their recognizing him. Normally, he spoke softly, but he was afraid they might recognize his voice (*Akeidah*; *Sforno*).

According to *Ramban*, the intent of וַיִּתְּנָפֶר is not *made himself a stranger* [נכרי] as *Rashi* interprets, but that he made himself unrecognizable [see *Cur Zahav* cited by *R' Chavel*]. Fearing that his brothers might recognize him, Joseph concealed his identity perhaps

brothers came and they bowed to him, faces to the ground.

⁷ Joseph saw his brothers and he recognized them, but he acted like a stranger toward them and spoke with them harshly. He asked them, "From where do you come?" And they said, "From the land of Ca-

by lowering his mitre to partially cover his face thereby disguising himself as Jeroboam's wife did [see *I Kings* 14:1, 5]. Or it means that he *disguised himself* by changing his voice and speaking to them in a gruff manner.

¶ Why did Joseph not reveal his identity to his brothers?

As discussed below in the comm. to v. 9, the commentators generally agree that Joseph's conduct toward his brothers was not a malicious attempt at vengeance. Rather he was motivated by the conviction that he had to secure the fulfillment of the prophetic dreams of his youth, something that was now made possible by his new eminence. He had never stopped believing his dreams. His special destiny, his astonishing rise to power, were they not all connected with dreams? He was apprehensive that if he were to reveal himself now, the brothers would:

(a) remind him that the dreaded oath of secrecy imposed upon him was still in force [see footnote to 37:28], for they would certainly not want their crime revealed to their father. He therefore devised a means to cause them to rescind the oath and reveal his whereabouts to Jacob (*B'chor Shor*); (b) they would insist that Jacob be sent for immediately — but Joseph knew that the fulfillment of his *second* dream called for Jacob to bow to him. First it was necessary to bring Benjamin before him so that all eleven brothers would bow in fulfillment of his *first* dream (see *Ramban* and comm. to v. 9).

Furthermore, as R' Hirsch makes clear below, virtually every action of Joseph was designed to test whether the brothers had changed — in filial devotion to Jacob, their love for Benjamin, and their sincere contrition for their

crime against Joseph himself. [Perhaps they bore a hatred for all of Rachel's children, and had done away with Benjamin, too! (*Ralbag*).] Had he revealed himself to them now, these facts could not be established. It would merely have resulted in a reunion of a family worse than before — perhaps worse than before — might have prevailed.

Abarbanel accordingly emphasizes that Joseph put his brothers to the test until he was convinced of all the above. At that point, however, he forgave them unreservedly, with all his love, because as Joseph later made clear, his mission was a Divine one [see 45:5]. However, though his heart overflowed with love, and he was moved to weeping while subjecting his brothers to this ordeal, he felt that he had to control himself and pretend to be a stranger, while he awakened their guilty conscience and brought about their repentance.

Onkelos renders the sense to be: וַחֲשִׁיב קֹחַ רַמְלִיל לָהֶם, and he considered what he should say to them.

The commentary to *Onkelos*, *HaMarpei*, writes that this interpretation is analogous with *Onkelos'* rendering of אֲחֵינוּ אֲנִי (they conspired against him) in 37:18 as וַחֲשִׁיבוּ עָלָיו, they considered about him. Following this opinion, it emerges that the Hebrew words וַחֲשִׁיבוּ and וַחֲשִׁיבוּ are synonyms, the letters ו and ח being interchangeable, as in the words קוֹל and קוֹר both synonymous for constellation. Accordingly, the connotation of *Onkelos* would be that Joseph was now repaying them measure for measure: because they conspired against him, he now feigned strangeness toward them. [In *I Kings* 14:5 the Targum renders מִשְׁתַּחֲוִּי as מִתְחַבְּרָה.

מֵאֵין בָּאֵתָם — From where did you come?

— Thus indicating that he did not recognize them (*Rashbam*).

מקץ ה' וַיִּבֶר יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו וְהֵם לֹא הִכְרָהוּ:
מב-ח ט ט וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֲלָמוֹת אֲשֶׁר חָלָם

He asked the question angrily, as if it were unusual for strangers to come before him. It was also apparently a way of verifying that they were really his brothers (Ramban).

מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לִשְׂכֹּר־אֹכֶל — From the land of Canaan to buy food.

Their overdone response to Joseph's inquiry gave ground for his accusation that they were spies. They should have replied simply, 'From the land of Canaan.' That they unnecessarily added 'to buy food,' implied that they were going out of their way to provide an excuse for their presence and avert suspicion (Abarbanel; Malbim).¹

8. וַיִּבֶר יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו — Thus, Joseph recognized his brothers.

Although v. 7 has told us that Joseph recognized his brothers, our verse reiterates the fact to emphasize that it was no mere coincidence that he had recognized them immediately, but not vice versa. Were that the case, Joseph could not have proceeded as he did, because of the danger that they might realize who he was. Therefore, the Torah stresses that he could easily recognize them, since, as Rashi observes [see below], they were bearded when he had last seen them and their appearance had not greatly changed. He, however, was then a beardless youth who had changed considerably in the intervening years. That being so, he was confident that

he could proceed undetected (Gur Aryeh).

That Joseph recognized Isaacar and Zevulun who were only a little older than he, and who were also presumably beardless when he last saw them, is no contradiction to the above. As Ramban observes, once he recognized the older brothers, he recognized each of them (Divrei David).

According to Ibn Ezra the repetition intimates that while at first Joseph recognized them as his brothers only collectively as a group [v. 7], now, after additional scrutiny, he distinguished each one individually.

Ramban comments that after the brothers said they came from Canaan, Joseph had an additional sense of recognition regarding them. While his earlier recognition was somewhat vague, now he knew with absolute certainty that they were his brothers (Akeidas Yitzchak).

He recognized them with certainty by now because in the course of conversation they referred to each other by name (Chizkuni).

וְהֵם לֹא הִכְרָהוּ — But [lit. and] they did not recognize him.

[I.e., his ruse was effective — they did not recognize him.]

The reason they did not recognize him was because he was now bearded while when they had last seen him [twenty-two years earlier when he was but a boy of seventeen years old] he had been beardless [Kesubos 27b] (Rashi).²

Moreover, Joseph recognized them because he knew they would eventually come, but they did not recognize him because it never occurred to them that this great regent

1. They felt an inner compulsion to justify themselves for leaving the holy environs of Eretz Yisrael, a deed that is ordinarily sinful (Bava Basra 91a), unless it is absolutely necessary. Although they were standing before a 'gentile' ruler to whom such considerations would not apply, they wished to make clear that they left Eretz Yisrael only because of the severity of the famine (Oznayim l'Torah).

42 naan to buy food." * Thus, Joseph recognized his
8-9 brothers but they did not recognize him.
* Joseph recalled the dreams that he dreamed about

of Egypt before whom they now stood in trepidation could possibly be the young brother whom they had once sold into slavery (Ramban; comp. Or HaChaim).

And, as noted above, his identity was even further concealed by the fact that he was not referred to as Joseph, but as Tzafenas Paane'ach [41:45].

9. וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֲלֻמוֹת אֲשֶׁר חָלַם לָהֶם — [And] Joseph recalled the dreams that he had dreamed about them [lit. to them; the translation about them (עֲלֵיהֶם=לָהֶם) follows Rashi].

[I.e., the dreams recorded in 37:7-9.]

He knew the dreams were fulfilled inasmuch as his brothers bowed down to him (Rashi).

¶ Joseph's motivation for the ordeal to which he subjected his brothers. [See also comm. to v. 7 above.]

Ramban disagrees with Rashi's comment that the dreams were now fulfilled. In a dissertation fundamental to a proper understanding of the narrative, Ramban maintains that when Joseph saw his brothers bowing down to him, he recalled the dreams and realized that neither of them had yet been completely fulfilled. He knew that the first dream required all eleven brothers to bow down to him, as indicated by the fact that he said [37:7], 'Behold, we were

binding sheaves' — 'we' referring to all eleven of his brothers. This was to be followed later by his father paying him homage, as indicated by his second dream [see 37:9-10].

[Joseph perceived the dreams to be prophecies, therefore for him not to labor toward their fulfillment would be tantamount to "withholding prophecy" (Haamek Davar).] Accordingly, Ramban maintains since Benjamin was absent at this first meeting, Joseph arranged a scheme to bring him to Egypt so the first dream could be fulfilled. Only then could he reveal his true identity to them and bid them to summon Jacob so the second dream could be fulfilled.

Ramban emphasizes that were it not for such considerations, Joseph would have been guilty of a serious sin in inflicting anxiety on Jacob, first by sending his brothers home without Simeon and then by demanding that Benjamin be brought to him. He would surely have identified himself immediately and spared his father pain and worry. — Similarly, the anxiety Joseph later inflicted upon them by hiding the goblet in Benjamin's sack was for the sole purpose of testing their love for Benjamin before allowing him to travel with them.

Ramban continues that the above explains why Joseph, in all his years in Egypt, did not send a single letter to Jacob; even as a slave he could have done so since Egypt is only six days from Canaan. Even if it were a year's journey, Jacob would have spared nothing to

2. According to the Midrash, the deeper connotation of this verse is that the Torah provides us with a glimpse into the comparative brotherly attitudes of Joseph and his brothers:

Joseph recognized his brothers — now that they were in his power he [nevertheless] recognized them as his brothers and was merciful to them; but they had not recognized him — when he had fallen into their hands they failed to act toward him in a brotherly manner (Rashi).

The above exegesis is based upon the repetition in this verse of his brothers, the verse could have used a pronoun and said, Joseph recognized 'them.' Accordingly the Sages understood the repetition of his brothers to intimate that despite their helplessness, he recognized them as brothers, i.e., with brotherly feelings (Gur Aryeh).

מִקֵּץ מִ/ לְרֹאוֹת אֶת-עֲרֹנֹת הָאָרֶץ בְּאֶתֶם: וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים מְרַגְלִים אַתֶּם

ransom him. But Joseph realized that the fulfillment of his dreams — the bowing, respectively, of his eleven brothers, and then of his father — could not possibly be accomplished in Canaan, and he hoped that it could be fulfilled now that he had attained eminence. The matter became even clearer to Joseph when he heard Pharaoh's dreams; he understood from them that his family was destined to come to Egypt in quest of grain and his dreams would be fulfilled. [Other reasons for Joseph's failure to contact Jacob throughout their twenty-two year separation — among them the ban of silence that had been imposed upon Joseph, and the fact that it was the Divine Will that Jacob be punished for the like amount of years he had been absent without communication from Isaac — have been discussed in the *comm.* to 41:51.] (Comp. *Aderes Eliyahu*).

R' Hirsch offers an entirely different rationale for Joseph's behavior: That Joseph wanted to be reunited with the House of Jacob is plain from the way he maintained his Jewishness in Egypt, the way he raised his children, and his wish to be buried in *Eretz Yisrael*. But he could not be reunited with his brothers unless they had purged themselves of their animosity toward him. Otherwise, even if the family had superficially come together, the gulf between him and his brothers would have remained. He would have been lost to them, and they to him.

To remove the old feelings of bitterness from his mind, two tests were needed:

1) Twenty-two years earlier, the brothers had not hesitated to deprive Jacob of his beloved son Joseph. What would they do now if circumstance was about to deprive Jacob of Benjamin as well? If they were prepared to risk personal sacrifice to prevent that tragedy from repeating itself, Joseph could

forgive the past, knowing that they had changed.

b) Joseph remembered their violent reaction to his dreams that showed him to be king over them. How much more malevolent could their attitude now be when he was *really* a king with absolute power over them! He had to show them that despite his enormous power, he would use it only to benefit them, without rancor or revenge. Then they would realize that their resentment and jealousy of him had been without basis, and then he could reveal himself to them hoping confidently that all the ill-will on both sides would be removed — with the result that the family would be united and Joseph would be restored as Jacob's son and his siblings' brother.

מְרַגְלִים אַתֶּם — *You are spies!*

Why did Joseph fabricate *this* particular accusation against them rather than some other one?

— This detail, too, demonstrates Joseph's wisdom. He suspected that once in Egypt, his brothers would try to seek him out since they knew that the Ishmaelite caravan to which they had sold him had been headed toward Egypt. He was concerned that if they inquired and investigated long enough, they might discover his true identity....

But if he denounced them as spies, they would not dare travel about making personal inquiries of strangers lest they thereby appear to substantiate Joseph's charge that they were spies seeking sensitive information (*Kli Yakar*).

Many people from every country came to Joseph to buy provisions and Joseph's brothers were among the multitudes. It is obvious therefore, that there must have been something about

them, so he said to them, "You are spies! To see the nakedness of the land have you come!"

¹⁰ They answered him, "Not so, my lord. But your

them that made the accusation plausible.

— They had aroused suspicion by making inquiries of malefactors on the street of prostitutes [see *Midrash* cited end of v. 3] (*Tanchuma*);

— They had entered through separate gates (*Rashi* v. 11 from *Midrash*). [That the Torah did not specifically mention this is inconsequential (*Ramban* v. 11).]

— While entering the country they tried to conceal themselves by mingling with the crowds [see v. 5] (*Kli Yakar*);

— They stayed together constantly (*Rashbam*);

— Possibly they came richly dressed as noblemen, thus giving Joseph a pretext for charging that such prominent people do not come in person to buy food but send their servants. [This apparently differs with the *Midrash* cited above which maintains that Joseph had issued a decree that each householder must personally come to buy grain; otherwise a wealthy slaveowner might send countless numbers of his slaves to purchase food for him.] It might also be that as noted in v. 6, s.v. ויוסף, they were the first ones to come from Canaan to buy grain. He therefore seized upon their reply — that they were from Canaan — as a pretext for accusing them of being spies since no one else had come from there. Joseph had this ruse in mind when he asked them where they were from (*Ramban*).

[Each of the above commentators understand the brothers' reply in v. 11 as an attempt to justify the act that aroused Joseph's 'suspicions'.]

לראות את-עירנות הארץ באדם — To see the nakedness of the land have you come.

The nakedness of the land, i.e., the exposed part of the land — where it is [not protected by a wall

and therefore] most vulnerable to attack. Compare other uses of this word connoting exposure and vulnerability in Lev. 20:18 and Ezekiel 16:7. Indeed, all forms of the verb ערעץ signify exposing. *Onkelos* renders ערעץ בִּרְקָא דְּעִרְעָא, the breach of the land (cf. II Kings 12:6); however, that is not meant as a literal translation (*Rashi*).

I.e., its secret places, called 'naked' in a figurative sense since these parts are usually concealed (*Ibn Ezra*).

— *Rashbam* comments: the breaches in its walls and its vulnerability to conquest. Interpreting the sense of the verb as exposure to destruction, he cites parallel forms in *Habakuk* 3:13; *Psalms* 137:7.

According to *Sforno*, the implication of Joseph's accusation is: 'You have not come to buy, because innocent purchasers do not stay in groups of ten. You have come to investigate whether we have sufficient food supply for our country.'

Implicit in this accusation is also the fact recorded in the *Midrash* above, that the brothers were discovered in the street of the prostitutes where they had gone in search of Joseph. 'You went there first,' Joseph charged, 'to literally gaze upon the nakedness of the earth. Why were you not afraid of congregating there and inciting the evil eye? Surely, you have come to spy!' 'Not so,' they countered, 'we lost something [our brother] and were looking for it — we felt that this overrode every other consideration' (*Sechel Tov*).

מקץ
מב/יא יג
אָליוּ לֹא אֲדֹנִי וְעַבְדֶּיךָ בָּאוּ לְשָׂכֵר-אָכֹל:
י א כָּלָנוּ בְּנֵי אִישׁ-אַחֵד נָחֲנוּ בָּנִים אֲנַחְנוּ
יב לֹא-הָיוּ עַבְדֶּיךָ מְרַגְלִים: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם
יג לֹא כִּי-עֲרֹת הָאָרֶץ בָּאתֶם לְרָאוֹת:
וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר עַבְדֶּיךָ אַחִים | אֲנַחְנוּ

10. לֹא אֲדֹנִי — *Not so, my lord.*

— Do not say this [i.e. that we are spies] (*Rashi*).

— *But* [i.e. truly; lit. and] *Your servants have come to buy food.*

— The syntax follows *Rashi*: Do not accuse us of spying, for your servants' purpose in coming was merely to buy food.

The propositional prefix ו of this phrase means *but*, i.e., *no my lord*, not as you maintain [that we are spies], *but we have come to buy food* (*Radak*).

11. כָּלָנוּ בְּנֵי אִישׁ אַחֵד נָחֲנוּ — *All of us — sons of one man are we.*

The Divine Spirit was enkindled within them and they unwittingly included Joseph in their statement by saying נָחֲנוּ, *are we* — including him; *all of us are sons of one father* (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

The Hebrew word for *we*, אֲנַחְנוּ, is spelled here without an א [numerically equalling 1], as נָחֲנוּ. Midrashically this indicates that one of the brothers was missing in the 'we' (*Baal HaTurim*). The various sources differ whether Benjamin or Joseph is alluded to. [See *Torah Sheleimah*].

Each of the above-cited commentators perceives in this answer a direct reply to Joseph's charge, paralleling the various interpretations of what prompted the accusation in v. 9:

— [We were on the street of prostitutes] — Because *we are all sons of one father* — the word נָחֲנוּ, *we*, spelled without an א indicating that one of them was missing — and we were looking for our missing brother who was

very handsome and might have been sold as a slave in a brothel (*Midrash*; see v. 13):

— [We entered through separate gates, inconspicuously mingling with the crowds] because *we are sons of one man*, and we were thereby complying with our father's wishes (*Midrash*);

— We stayed together constantly — not because we are spies but because *we are all sons of one man* (*Rashbam*);

— 'We have all come in person instead of having one of us come with servants for the rest of us since it is our father's will that we remain inseparable.' The implication of this is that servants could not be entrusted to properly guard precious grain on the journey against robbery, since the famine was severe. A further implication of their reply was: *All of us — sons of one man are we*; You can investigate him for he is known in the gates by the vastness of his wealth and multitude of his children (*Ramban*).

— How could you suspect us of all being spies? *We are all the sons of one man*. Ten men fit for such dangerous work could not be found in one family. Furthermore, a father would not send all his sons on such a mission (*Akeidas Yitchak*; *Daas Zekeinim*; comp. *Or HaChaim*).

נָחֲנוּ בְּנֵים אֲנַחְנוּ — *We are truthful people.*

This is a continuation of the previous argument: *We are all sons of one man* — about whom you can inquire. You can therefore easily ascertain that we are trustworthy, righteous men, sons of a righteous man — we are certainly not spies (*Ramban*).

42 servants have come to buy food.”¹¹ All of us — sons
10-12 of, one man are we. We are truthful people; your servants have never been spies.”

¹² And he said to them, “No! but to see the land in its nakedness you have come.”

¹³ And they replied, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of

The word כנים means *truthful*. Cf. the similar meaning of כן meaning *true; right*, in Exod. 20:29, and Numbers 28:7: *The daughters of Zelaphechad speak right* [כן]; comp. also Isaiah 16:6 where לא-כן means *untruthful* (Rashi).

לֹא־הֵיוּ עֲבָדֶיךָ מְרִגְלִים — Your servants have never [lit. not] been spies.

I.e., there are absolutely no grounds for such suspicions.

The translation follows Ramban: we have been trustworthy in all our affairs from our youth on. *We have never been spies all our lives.*

12. לֹא בִייעָרְנוּ הָאָרֶץ בְּאֵתָם לְרֹאוֹת — No! but to see the land in its nakedness you have come.

— ‘It cannot be as you say. If you are brothers traveling together you should have entered the country together and not by ten different gates [cf. footnote v. 3]. Therefore, since you entered by different gates you must be involved in some conspiracy’ (Rashi; Ramban).

Rashi cites the Midrashic interpretation regarding their entering via different gates here, rather than above in v. 9, since it fits in better with the context of their reply in the next verse (Mizrachi).

Ramban defends the Midrashic thread of the narrative and mentions that the Torah did not record every detail of what was obviously a longer exchange since it did not care to prolong the discussion.

— ‘If you did not come here to spy [and you are all the sons of one man], how is it that not even one of

you remained behind with your [evidently aged] father?’ He asked them this to ascertain whether Benjamin was still alive [for, as noted above, Joseph was concerned that they might have hated all of Rachel’s children and have done away with Benjamin, too (Ralbag)]. They accordingly replied [next verse] that there were twelve brothers, and while one of them was missing, the youngest was indeed at home with their father. That Joseph did in fact question them about the family [although the Torah did not record that part of the dialogue] follows from what they later told their father [see 43:7] (Rashbam).

According to Sforno: ‘No, it is not true that you are brothers. You are strangers and only pretending to be brothers to mask your spying!’

13. שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר עֲבָדֶיךָ אֲחִים אֲנַחְנוּ — We, your servants, are twelve brothers [lit. twelve, your servants, brothers are we].

[I.e., It is not as you charge that our entry through separate gates tends to indicate that we are not really brothers, and that we are conspirators. The converse is true, for we are not only ten, but twelve brothers, and since one of our brothers is no more, we had a special reason for entering separately. (See Rashi below s.v. and one is no more.) [See Rashbam cited end of v. 12.]

מקץ
מב/יד-טו יד בְּנֵי אִישׁ־אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְהִנֵּה הֵקֵטָן
אֶת־אֲבִינוּ הַיּוֹם וְהָאֶחָד אֵינָנוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲלֵכֶם
טו לֵאמֹר מְרַגְלִים אַתֶּם: בְּזֹאת תִּבְחָנוּ חַי
פְּרַעֲה אִם־תִּצְאוּ מִזֶּה כִּי אִם־בָּבוֹא

Sforno maintains that by this response, the brothers attempted to prove their innocence by providing easily verifiable details about themselves and their family.

According to *R' Avraham ben HaRambam* [citing his grandfather, *R' Maimon*], their response in this verse did not really counter the charge of spying, but was in answer to an unrecorded question Joseph must have asked about their family. Such additional dialogue is alluded to by the brothers in their recapitulation of their adventures to Jacob, later in 43:7. However except for this answer, the Torah, in usual Scriptural style, did not elaborate on the dialogue here.

— *The sons of one man in the land of Canaan.*

— A land which is on friendly terms with Egypt. It is nearby, and even should it desire to attack, has no need to send spies (*Haamek Davar*).

— *The youngest is now [lit. today] with our father.*

According to *Rashbam* in the previous verse, this was their reply to Joseph's objection that they would not all have left home without leaving a brother home to care for their father and household. They emphasized that they were twelve brothers, and indeed, the youngest remained at home to attend to their father [also, *Radak*].

Maasei Hashem explains the in-

tent to be: the brother whom we left at home will testify that we are brothers. No man would falsely claim kinship with people who are charged with such a grave offense [see *Torah Sheleimah*].

[In any event, it must be noted that as a by-product of this remark, Joseph learned that his aged father was still alive.]

— *And one is gone.*

I.e., we do not know where he is (*Targum Yonasan*).

— And it was to find him that we scattered (*Rashi*, see above).

The expression *איננו*, *is gone*, may be taken in the sense of *dead* as in the case of Chanoch (above 5:24) or *missing*, since they really had no idea what his true condition was; they knew only that they had sold him to a caravan headed toward Egypt (*Radak*). [Comp. comm. below to 44:20 where they specifically refer to Joseph as being *dead*.]

14. [Joseph repeats the accusation. He pretends to find their protests of innocence unconvincing, and now emphasizes his firm belief in their guilt. He is the supreme viceroy of Egypt, and as such he knows that he does not have to justify his accusations; rationally it suffices that such is his whim. The brothers are totally in his power, and Joseph uses this to his full advantage and proceeds with his well-planned scheme.]

הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲלֵכֶם לֵאמֹר מְרַגְלִים
אַתֶּם — *It is just as I have declared to*

42 Canaan. The youngest is now with our father and
14-15 one is gone."

¹⁴ But Joseph said to them, "It is just as I have declared to you: 'You are spies!' ¹⁵ By this shall you be tested: By Pharaoh's life you will not leave here

you: [saying] 'You are spies!'

The plain meaning is that Joseph reiterated his accusation: *The statement that I made that you are spies is true and certain.* According to the Midrash, however, the following exchange took place:

'If you found your missing brother', Joseph asked, 'and a large sum were demanded for his release, would you pay it?'

'Yes', they replied.

'And what if they refused to release him at any price?'

'That was our purpose in coming here — to kill or be killed' [in liberating him], they retorted.

'Then,' Joseph countered, 'it is just as I have said to you: you have come to slay the people of this city, for I have seen in my divining cup that two of you destroyed the city of Shechem!' (*Rashi*).

According to *Radak*: If ten brothers came, why did you not already bring the youngest who you claim you left with your father? Your wives and children could have stayed behind to look after the old man! Therefore, it is as I said ... you are spies!

That your youngest brother stayed behind proves my contention. Because your father knew you were on a dangerous errand he would not allow the youngster to go with you! (*R' Hirsch*).

You said nothing before about another brother! — Your whole story must be a lie! (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

— Even if there are eleven of you, surely no father would send out ten and

allow only the youngest to remain behind in full charge of the household and flocks! This proves that my charge is true! (*Abarbanel; Malbim*).

15. בְּזֹאת תִּבְחָנוּ—By this shall you be tested.

If your statement regarding a youngest brother can be verified, I will believe everything else you said as well (*B'chor Shor*).

— For if you are not brothers, you will not find a youngster to risk his life coming with you to lie and put himself into the same danger of death as you now are (*Sforno*).

חַי פַּרְעֹה — [By] Pharaoh's life.

Lit. the life of Pharaoh, i.e., if Pharaoh shall live. [This was a formula for a kind of oath or strong assertion, as if to say, 'I swear by Pharaoh's life' (*Gur Aryeh*); i.e., 'Just as I wish the king to live so do I wish that the following occur' (*Divrei David*).] Whenever Joseph swore falsely [as he did now when his oath was not intended seriously for he *did* release them before they brought their younger brother to Egypt (see v. 19)], he swore by Pharaoh's life (*Rashi*).

Actually, as *R' Bachya* insists, Joseph did not swear falsely in this case, for he did not release them all from prison; Simeon remained behind.

[The Scriptural Hebrew forms of oath were חַי ה' the Living God, חַי נַפְשִׁי, as your soul lives, cf. *I Sam.* 14:39; 17:55.]¹¹

1. *Rambam* [*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 2:10] notes that when an oath is made on a human, the word is punctuated חַי, but when it refers to God it is punctuated חַי. In the former, the proper

מקץ מ/טז יח
 טו אַחֵיכֶם הִקְטֵן הִנֵּה: שְׁלַחוּ מִכֶּם אֶחָד
 וַיִּקַּח אֶת־אֲחֵיכֶם וְאֶתֶּם הֶאָסְרוּ וַיִּבְחֲנוּ
 דְּבָרֵיכֶם הָאֵמֶת אִתְּכֶם וְאִם־לֹא חַי
 יו פְּרָעָה בִּי מִרְגְּלִים אִתְּכֶם: וַיֹּאסֹף אֶתֶּם
 יח אֶל־מִשְׁמַר שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

אִם־תֵּצְאוּ מִזֶּה בִּי אִם־יִבְכוּ אֲחֵיכֶם
 הִקְטֵן הִנֵּה — You will not leave from here [lit. from this i.e., from this place (Rashi)] unless your youngest brother comes here.

[Joseph's real motive in wanting them to bring Benjamin has been analyzed in the footnote and comm. to verses 7 and 9 respectively.]

— Ostensibly, he wanted to interrogate their youngest brother who — because of his age — would probably provide the most revealing information (*Alshich; Akeidas Yitzchak*).

It must have remained unclear to the brothers, however, why the presence of Benjamin would suffice to absolve them from this regent's capricious charge that they were spies. But they knew that they were powerless against his demands; a ruler's whims are not always rational (*Daas Soferim*).

The Hebrew literally reads אִם if you will leave ... The translation of this phrase in the context of an oath as meaning you shall not leave ... follows the rule expounded in the comm. to 14:23 s.v. וְאִם אָקֵחַ. Comp. also *Rambam* cited to 21:23 s.v. אִם תִּשְׁקֹר.

16. שְׁלַחוּ מִכֶּם אֶחָד וַיִּקַּח אֶת־אֲחֵיכֶם וְאֶתֶּם הֶאָסְרוּ — Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother while you shall remain [lit. be] imprisoned.

But the brothers, as we shall see, did not voluntarily select one of their number to go. They knew the effort would be futile, and they

were concerned about their father's grief when he would learn from one brother that the others had been imprisoned in Egypt (*Alshich; Or HaChaim*).

Later, when Joseph heard their expressions of remorse at having callously sold him (v. 22 ff.), he freed all except one of them, it having been his purpose that they acknowledge their sinfulness for having sold him. When he now suggested that they choose one of them to go, he was certain they would select Reuben, since as firstborn, the right of freedom was due him. Furthermore, he assumed they would acknowledge that Reuben was least responsible for the sale and was thereby most deserving to be freed. For, although Simeon and Levi bore primary responsibility for the sale, even Judah was involved and, as *Rashi* comments in 38:1, the brothers held him responsible for it and deposed him from his leadership as a result (*Kli Yakar*).

According to *Malbim*, Joseph did not intend that one of the brothers go to fetch Benjamin; that would defeat the overt purpose of establishing their veracity since the one fetching him could coach him on the way. Rather Joseph wanted them to select a stranger who would go on their behalf to fetch Benjamin. The interpretation, then, of שְׁלַחוּ מִכֶּם אֶחָד, would be send from

translation is [by] Pharaoh's life, and in the latter the Living God — for in contrast to human beings and their lives, God and His life are one and the same (*R' Munk*).

unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶ Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother while you shall remain imprisoned, so that your words may be tested whether truth is with you. But if not, by Pharaoh's life — surely you are spies!" ¹⁷ Then he herded them into a ward for three days.

you [i.e., on your behalf] one.

וְאַתֶּם הָאֲסוּרִים — While [lit. and] you shall remain [lit. be] imprisoned.

Although the word הָאֲסוּרִים *be imprisoned* is in the imperative form, *Ibn Ezra* explains that it is not a command [since one does not imprison himself; others imprison him (*Karnei Or*)] but like תֵּאסְרוּ is a statement of fact: and you shall be imprisoned. It is similar to God's command to Moses [*Deut.* 32:50] וּמוֹת בְּהָרַיִם, which is not to be rendered in the imperative: and die on the mountain, but as a statement of fact: and you will die on the mountain. [Comp. *Ibn Ezra* to 1:22 פָּרוּ וְרָבוּ.]

Abarbanel explains the imperative sense to be: While you willfully submit yourselves to imprisonment.

וְיִבְחֲנוּ דְבָרֵיכֶם הָאֵמֶת אִתְּכֶם — That [lit. and] your words may be tested whether truth is with you.

Although the one who brings him might coach him en route, I will still be able to determine the truthfulness of your claims (*Abarbanel*).

The הָאֵמֶת is punctuated with a *patach* to indicate that it is an interrogative participle and the word forms a kind of question, *Is there truth?* [Had the word been punctuated with a *kametz*, הָאֵמֶת, the הָ would indicate the definite article and the word would mean *the truth*] (*Rashi*).

לֹא — But [lit. and] if not.

I.e., but if you do not bring your younger brother back here [and thereby verify your claims] (*Rashi*).

בְּיַד פְּרָעָה בִּי מְרִגְלִים אֵתֶם — [By] Pharaoh's life surely you are spies.

— And you will never leave here (*Ralbag*).

By making this assertion, Joseph wished to convince them that it was futile to offer any further arguments (*Abarbanel*).

וַיֵּאסֶף אֹתָם אֶל-מִשְׁכַּר שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים — Then [lit. and] he herded them into a ward for three days.

— He did this to frighten them and make them more submissive (*Ramban*).

[Perhaps Joseph had expected his brothers to consent readily to his proposal that they select one of them to return home and fetch Benjamin. When none of them volunteered, he feigned anger and ordered them imprisoned until he decided how to proceed.]

This period of incarceration would enable them to realize the gravity of their predicament and to allow the urgency of it to work its effect on them (*R' Hirsch*).

— Three days — corresponding to their three acts against him: removing his tunic; throwing him into the pit; and selling him (*Baal HaTurim*).

According to a view in the *Zohar*, the three days corresponded to the three days the people of Shechem were in pain as a result of the brothers' scheme [34:25].

The number three is significant. The Midrash enumerates many instances of important events in the history of Jewish salvation which occurred on the third day, among them that Joseph freed his brothers on the third day and the Torah was given on the third day [*Exodus* 19:16]. See also *Esther* 5:1 and *Jonah* 2:1. The Sages accordingly

יוסף ביום השלישי זאת עשו וחייו את-
האלהים אני ירא: אם-כנים אתם
אחיכם אחד יאסר בבית משמרכם
ואתם לכו הביאו שפר רעבון בתיכם:

מקץ
מב/יט
יט
יחמישי

observed that 'God does not allow His righteous to remain in dire straits for more than three days.'

The term *משמר* [ward] refers to a prison (*Rashi*).

Rashi does not make this comment above in 40:3 where the term first appears, because the context of that verse makes the definition self-evident (*Mizrachi*).

18. Realizing that — their incarceration notwithstanding — his earlier suggestion that one of the brothers volunteer to return home and fetch Benjamin would not be accepted, Joseph makes a different proposal.

— ויאמר אלהם יוסף ביום השלישי
[And] Joseph said to them on the third day.

— He did not detain them longer; he was afraid of the grief their extended absence would cause Jacob (*Abarbanel*).

וזאת עשו וחייו — Do this and live.

I.e., follow the advice I offer you and you will be spared (*Abarbanel*).

ואת האלהים אני ירא — I fear God.¹¹

— And accordingly, I will not keep all of you imprisoned while your families are starving. I will release most of you to allow you to bring provisions home while I detain only one of you to establish your veracity (*Radak*; *Ramban*; *Sforno*).

— It is improper that I, as a religious man, detain you all on mere suspicion (*Abarbanel*).

— I am a religious man, and I find no pleasure in harming you or keeping you detained. I merely want to establish your truthfulness, and therefore offer you the following plan (*Ibn Caspi*).

[When the Divine Name is preceded by the definite article *האלהים*, lit. the God it designates Him in the midst of His celestial tribunal.

[References to אלהים, God, uttered

1. Many people fear God in poverty, but when they become wealthy they place their trust in their money and lose their piety, but Joseph was different. He feared God as a slave, as he said, 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' [39:9]. His piety was even greater when he became a ruler, as he specifically proclaimed I fear God! (*Tanchuma Naso*).

The *Midrash* [*Sh'mos Rabbah* 26:3] maintains that when Amalek attacked Israel it was Joshua — a descendant of Joseph — who was instructed by Moses to select warriors to battle Amalek. Moses said to him, "Your ancestor [Joseph] said, 'I fear God', while of Amalek it is written: He did not fear God [*Deut.* 25:18]. Let the descendant of the former inflict retribution on the latter."

R' Munk records that the fear of God which Joseph felt was of the same kind as Abraham's (*Avos d'Rabbi Nosson* 10:13), meaning that it was a product of his love of God (*יראה מאהבה*) [*Sotah* 31b]. This form of ה', 'fear' of God, is far loftier than a primitive fear of Divine punishment (*יראה העונש*); it is a form of reverence based on a tripod of love, worship and fear [*יראה הרוממות*, awe of the Divine majesty]. It is, as it were, the crowning glory of an all-encompassing love.

However, the *Zohar* points out that for Joseph, the reference to the fear of God implied first and foremost that he had resolved not to pay back evil with evil. He wanted to follow the maxim given in *Proverbs* (20:22): Say not I will pay back the evil! Have confidence in HASHEM. He will help you.

¹⁸ Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live; I fear God: ¹⁹ If you are truthful people let one of your brothers be imprisoned in your place of confinement while the rest of you go and bring provisions for the hunger of your households.

by gentiles — as Joseph here pretended to be — addressing Hebrews are not uncommon in Scripture. Joseph's remark should accordingly *not* be construed as an implicit admission by Joseph to his brothers of his true identity. Abimelech referred to *God* in conversation with Isaac (21:22), as did Pharaoh in conversation with Joseph (41:38, 39). Accordingly, his profession of faith in *God* did not arouse their suspicions.]

19. אַם בְּנִים אַתֶּם — If you are truthful [people].

[I.e., if you wish to prove to me that you are truthful people.]...

אֲחֵיכֶם אֶחָד יִאָסֵר בְּבֵית מִשְׁמָרְכֶם — Let one of your brothers be imprisoned, in your place of confinement [lit. guardhouse].¹¹

I.e., in the building where you have been confined until now (Rashi).

וְאַתֶּם לְבֹנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה יֵשְׁבוּ בְּתֵיכֶם — While [lit. and] [the rest of you] go

and bring provisions for the hunger of your households.

I.e., bring home what you have purchased [שָׂכַר according to Rashi in 41:56 is a noun referring to purchased provisions] to feed the hungry members of your household (Rashi).

The Hebrew which literally reads "...and bring שָׂכַר, a 'break', for the hunger of your households," homilectically intimates the moderation one must exercise during times of famine — the amount consumed should be sufficient only to 'break' the hunger; indulgence should be avoided (R' Bachya).

The expression שָׂכַר רֵעֶבּוֹן בְּתֵיכֶם literally refers to that which will 'break' the hunger i.e., wheat. Therefore, wheat is referred to as שָׂכַר, as we have explained earlier (Radak).

Joseph purposely emphasized that his reason for releasing them was to allow them to take provisions to their starving households. He was certain that otherwise they would never have voluntarily agreed to leave one behind (Ramban v. 17) [see v. 24].

1. The deeper implication of this verse may be understood on the basis of *Yerushalmi Terumos* 8:4, which states that if gentile brigands confront a group of Jews and say to them, 'Give us one of your group that we may kill him or else we will kill all of you', then even if all of them would be killed they may not surrender a single person in Israel. However, if they demand that a specific individual be given them, [the Jews] should surrender him, and not let all of them be killed. Comp. the case of Sheva son of Bichri as related in *II Samuel* chapt. 20.

This was Joseph's intent when he said, 'If you are truthful people,' i.e. since you know whether you are truly innocent, you should have no qualms about letting one — [without specifying which one] — of your brothers be imprisoned, for you certainly believe that he will be in no danger of being killed [since once you return with your younger brother your truthfulness will be proven and Simeon will be released]. The converse implication is also true; if their innocence was at all doubtful they would have no right to offer up one of their own for a seemingly certain death.

That we find later that Joseph selected Simeon — which is tantamount to specifying one of them — is no contradiction. Possibly, they chose him first, or after they decided to choose one brother, Joseph anticipated them by selecting Simeon, in order to separate him from his cohort, Levi (*Or HaChaim*).

[See *comm.* to v. 24 where contrasting views are cited to the effect that Joseph selected Simeon *after* the brothers — though consenting in principle to Joseph's plan — refused to make the selection of which brother to surrender.]

מקץ ^כ וְאֶת־אֲחֵיכֶם הִקְטַן תְּבִיאוּ אֵלַי וַיֵּאמְרוּ
מב/כ-כא ^{כא} דְּבָרֵיכֶם וְלֹא תָמוּתוּ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן: וַיֹּאמְרוּ
אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו אָבֵל אֲשָׁמִים | אֲנַחְנוּ עַל־
אָחִינוּ אֲשֶׁר רָאִינוּ צָרָת נַפְשׁוֹ בְּהִתְחַנְנוּ

20. *So your words will be verified.* — וַיֵּאמְרוּ דְּבָרֵיכֶם.

For as soon as you produce your youngest brother I will believe all your other statements as well (*Alshich*).

— *And you will not die.* — For I can have you put to death even in Canaan if you do not return (*Sforno*).

— From the famine, for if your words are verified you will be free to buy as much grain as your households will require (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

The verb וַיֵּאמְרוּ [from the root אָמַן, *truth*] means *verified* and *confirmed*. Compare Numbers 5:22 and 1 Kings 8:26 (*Rashi*).

Rashi offers this comment to avoid misinterpreting the word as *be believed* [from אָמַן, *faith*] (*Mizrachi*).

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן — *And they consented* [lit. *and they did so*; comp. this meaning of the verb עָשָׂה in 29:28].

They consented to leave one brother behind, and promised to fetch their youngest brother (*R' Avraham ben HaRambam*).

— They said: 'We are under your authority: Take whomever you wish!' (*R' Bachya*).

21. The brothers become introspective regarding their lot and recognize what has befallen them as a Divine punishment for their cruel treatment of Joseph. 'Happy are the righteous,' declares *Midrash HaGadol*, 'who submit to retribution with joy and declare the Almighty just in whatever way He acts.'

They then said to one another [lit. *man to his brother*].

Simeon said this to Levi. They are discreetly described with the same expression *man to his brother* when they conspired against Joseph in 37:19: *They said man to his brother, 'See, this dreamer comes!'* [see *comm.* there]. Simeon [as the elder of the two, and presumably the speaker] was now penitent over what he had done, and remorsefully cried out to Levi, 'Indeed we are guilty ...' (*Zohar*).

An interpreter had been present throughout Joseph's communication with them [see v. 23] because Joseph feigned ignorance of Hebrew lest they realize his true identity. When Joseph had finished addressing them the interpreter stepped out so the brothers felt free to converse without fear that the interpreter would repeat their discussion to Joseph (*Radak; Akeidah*).

— *Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother.*

They examined their pasts and concluded that the only sin which they had committed was the mistreatment of their own flesh and blood, for which retribution was now being meted out to them (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:18).

B'chor Shor interprets our passage to mean: Indeed אֲשָׁמִים אֲנַחְנוּ, *we are being punished*, concerning our brother אֲשָׁם as אָשָׁם means *penalty, sin*, well as *guilt* (*HaKsav V'HaKabbalah*). They realized that the sin of selling their brother was the only trespass for which they could be held *collectively* responsi-

42 20 Then bring your youngest brother to me so your words will be verified and you will not die." And they consented.

21 They then said to one another, "Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we

ble and for which they were now being punished as a group. [See *Or HaChaim* below.]

The translation of אָבֵל [usually rendered *but*] as *indeed*, in *truth*, follows *Onkelos* cited by *Rashi*, *Ibn Janach* and *Ibn Ezra*. Comp. 17:19 above אָבֵל שָׂרָה אֲשֶׁתָּה. *Rashi* mentions that in the *Midrash* it is noted that in the Roman language [רִימָקָה lit. 'of Roma' (i.e. Latin), or 'Southern', possibly a reference to the dialect of the inhabitants of south Eretz Yisrael] the word אָבֵל is used in the sense of בְּרָם [=verum], *true; indeed*.¹¹

R' Hirsch perceives אָבֵל even in our context as similar to *but*, in that it expresses a contrast to a previous assumption. For more than twenty years they were convinced that their action against Joseph was a justifiable act of self-defense ... But now, in analyzing the possible reason for the misfortune now befalling them, they realize that unatoned wrongs have come to the fore: 'אָבֵל! After all, whatever we have been telling ourselves is not true; we are guilty concerning our brother!' It is noteworthy, however, that, as they go on to say, they recognize having sinned only in not showing compassion when Joseph pleaded, but they are still convinced that they did the right thing in selling him.

Or HaChaim [in a comment similar to

B'chor Shor's above] maintains that the brothers had searched for a sin they had all committed which could be the cause of their present common suffering. They ruled out the sale itself since Reuben had not participated in it. Therefore, they said אָבֵל, *but*, we are all guilty over having witnessed our brother's supplications. That is, while we bear no collective guilt for the sale, and our collective troubles could not be in retribution for that, אָבֵל, nevertheless we bear common guilt over the suffering we inflicted on Joseph when we cast him into the pit and turned a deaf ear to his supplications — for in this act Reuben also participated. This, too, is the sense of: that is why this distress has come upon us — i.e. all of us, collectively.

[Additionally, those commentators who maintain that it was not the brothers who actually sold Joseph (see *comm.* to 37:27, "Who sold Joseph?") cite our verse in which the brothers express remorse only over their callousness and not over the sale itself, as support for their view.]

אֲשֶׁר רָאִינוּ צָרָתוֹ וְנָפְשׁוֹ בְּהִתְחַנְּנוֹ אֵלֵינוּ — ולא שֶׁמֵּצֵנוּ Inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish [lit. anguish of his soul] when he had pleaded with [lit. at] us and we paid no heed.

They regarded this callousness

1. Indeed, the term אָבֵל in the sense of *Alas*, is still used to express a feeling of contrition. It has been adopted by the *siddur* as an introduction to the confession of sins: אָבֵל אֲנַחְנוּ וְתַעֲבוּנוּ. *Alas we have sinned*.

The brothers react to this misfortune in an authentically Jewish manner. Rather than blaming the hard-hearted vicery and indulging in self-pity, they seek the real cause of their adversity in themselves. As we say in the liturgical confession... שְׂאֵין אֲנוּ צְדִיקִים We are not so insolent nor so stubborn that we consider ourselves as righteous people who have never sinned, אָבֵל אֲנַחְנוּ וְתַעֲבוּנוּ, *but alas, we have sinned* [Prayer Book]. Only in his own moral or religious conduct does the Jew search for the source of the trials that destiny inflicts upon him (R' Munk).

מִקֵּץ מִבְּכֹבֶד כִּבְּכֹבֶד בְּ הַצָּרָה הַזֹּאת: וַיֵּצֵן רְאוּבֵן אֹתָם לֵאמֹר
הֲלוֹא אֲמַרְתִּי אֲלֵיכֶם | לֵאמֹר אֶל-
תַּחֲטְאוּ בִילֵד וְלֹא שְׁמַעְתֶּם וְגַם-דָּמוֹ
בְּ הַנֶּה נִדְרָשׁ: וְהֵם לֹא יָדְעוּ כִּי שָׁמַע יוֹסֵף

toward the entreaties of their blood brother as deserving even greater punishment than the actual sale. That Joseph implored them is not related in the story of the sale [chapt. 37], since it is obvious that he must have invoked every possible plea to save himself from death. Possibly, the Torah preferred not to list their sin in all its details, or the omission is characteristic of the Torah's practice of intentionally shortening a narrative in one place and elaborating on the details elsewhere (Ramban). [See commentary to 37:24.]

Torn by their stricken conscience, they drew a contrast between the Egyptian viceroy's compassionate attitude toward their starving families — although the families were aliens and he would not personally witness their suffering — and the cruelty they had long ago displayed to their own brother. Joseph was their flesh and blood. They personally witnessed his suffering and heard his impassioned pleas, yet they remained callous to him (Yafeh Toar).

Although they did not consider as sinful their death sentence against Joseph, for they had rationalized it as a legitimate act of self-defense [see comm. to 37:18], in retrospect they now felt that they should nevertheless have shown compassion for his cries. Accordingly, they surmised that it was in retribution for their own callousness that the Egyptian ruler was subjecting them to this suffering (Sforno; Malbim).

That — על־כן בָּאָה אֵלֵינוּ הַצָּרָה הַזֹּאת

is why this distress has come upon [lit. to] us.

— Measure for measure. We threw him in a pit; therefore we have been thrown into this prison (Rashbam).

We learn from this account that when a person is beset by trouble he should search out his deeds and establish what sin he has committed. He should express his regret for it, confess to the Almighty and beg for atonement (Radak).

R' Bachya interprets על־כן in this context to mean *quite properly and justly* has this distress come upon us. כִּן in this sense means *true, correct* as in Numbers 28:7. [Comp. כִּן above in v. 11.]

Rashi offers the grammatical observation that the word בָּאָה is accented on the first syllable בָּ because it is the past perfect tense — *has come* — for the distress had already come upon them. Onkelos also rendered it in the perfect tense אָתָּה.

[Comp. comm. to 29:6 where בָּאָה is accented on the second syllable אָ and Rashi notes that it indicates present tense, is *coming*, as does Onkelos who renders אָתָּה. However, in *ibid.* v. 9 the accent is on the first syllable בָּ and Onkelos renders as in our verse אָתָּה. Cf. also Rashi to בָּאָה in 16:17 and בָּאָה in Ruth 1:15.]

22. — [And] וַיֵּצֵן רְאוּבֵן אֹתָם לֵאמֹר [And] Reuben retorted to them as follows [lit. saying].

His retort was inspired by their statement that they were אַשְׁמִים, *guilty*, a term which denotes sin through *inadvertence*. He refuted them, saying that there was no excuse for their offense since he had attempted to dissuade them, but

42 paid no heed. That is why this distress has come
22-23 upon us."

²² Reuben retorted to them as follows, "Did I not say to you in effect, 'Do not sin against the boy' but you would not listen! And his blood as well — see! it is being avenged." ²³ Now they did not know that

they refused to listen [see 37:21,22] (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

הָלוֹא אָמַרְתִּי אֵלֵיכֶם לֵאמֹר אַל-תַּחַסּוּ בְיָלֶד — Did I not say to you, in effect [lit. saying], 'Do not sin against the boy.'

— I.e. for he was only a boy. It was only because of his youth that he wronged you, and you should have overlooked his trespasses for that reason (*Ramban*).

Although Reuben had not specifically said [in Chap. 37] the words 'Do not sin against the boy,' he had urged his brothers 'we will not take his life...shed no blood' [37:21, 22]. When he suggested that they throw Joseph into the pit [ibid.], his intention, as the Torah attests in that verse, was that they not even harm Joseph. Reuben now maintains that he had been stalling for time, intending that they do *nothing* to the boy — certainly not sell him to brigands who might harm him! — but that they restore him unharmed to their father. He could not, however, specifically say so at the time since, as noted there, he was afraid of them and knew such direct efforts would be futile (*Akeidas Yitzchak*; *Or HaChaim*).

[Our translation of *לאמר* as *in effect* rather than the more common, *saying*, is based on the above comments of *Akeidas Yitzchak* and *Or HaChaim*. As they note, Reuben did not actually say these exact words; they were implied in his urging that Joseph not be put to death. However, see *Ramban* to 37:22 who maintains that Reuben probably did tell them these words at the time, but the Torah did not record it there.

Comp. also *Ramban* in v. 21 above who maintains that it is characteristic of the Torah to shorten a narrative in one place and elaborate on the details elsewhere.]

וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם — But you would not listen?!

— I.e., you pretended not to understand that I wanted you to not harm him at all (*Ralbag*; *Akeidah*; cf. *Or HaChaim* above).

וְגַם-דָּמּוֹ הִנֵּה נִרְכָּשׁ — And his blood as well — see! it is being avenged.

In addition to the display of cruelty to which you admit, his blood is being avenged. Possibly the intent of the phrase is: Though you did not kill Joseph with your own hands, you sold him into a life of hard labor as a slave. Unaccustomed to such work, he must have died by now because of what you did. God considers you his murderers and He will avenge Joseph's blood of you (*Ramban*).

Rashi follows the Rabbinical rule that particles such as *אֵת* and *בְּ* indicate a *רֵבּוּי*, extension, beyond the literal scope of the clause (cf. 1:1, *Deut.* 10:20; *Exod.* 20:12). In our case, therefore the phrase *his blood also is being avenged* implies his blood in addition to the blood of some other person involved with him. The implication is that Joseph's blood — as well as the blood of our father, who suffers intense grief because of you — [see

מקץ כר כי המליץ בינתם: ויסב מעליהם ויבך
 מב/כר-כה וישב אליהם וידבר אליהם ויקח מאתם
 כה את-שמעון ויאסר אותו לעיניהם: ויצו
 יוסף וימלאו את-כליהם בָר וּלְהָשִׁיב
 בְּסִפֵּיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל-שָׁקוֹ וּלְתַת לָהֶם צֹדָה

37:35] — now cries out for retribution. (1)

23. הָאֵם לֹא יָדְעוּ כִּי שָׁמַע יוֹסֵף כִּי — Now they did not know that Joseph understood [lit. was hearing (see above 41:15)], for an interpreter was between them.

When they had spoken to Joseph earlier, an interpreter translated their Hebrew and his Egyptian. Consequently, they assumed that Joseph did not understand their language. [Therefore, now that the interpreter had left — for it is obvious that they would not have spoken these incriminating words had he still been present (*Radak*; *Mizrachi*)], they spoke freely among themselves in Joseph's presence. According to the *Midrash*, the interpreter was Menasseh, Joseph's first born son (*Rashi*).

24. וַיִּסָּב מֵעֲלֵיהֶם — Then he [Joseph] turned away from them.

— And stayed at a distance so they would not see him crying (*Rashi*).

וַיִּבֶךְ — And [he] wept.

Over having heard their expressions of remorse for their past conduct toward him (*Rashi*).

His feelings of compassion for them were aroused (*Sechel Tov*); and he wept at witnessing their distress (*Sforno*).

Bereishis Rabbossi maintains that Joseph was moved to tears at the implication of the phrase *and his blood also* which reminded him of the grief of his aged father.

However, he could not yet reveal himself to them for his prophetic dreams were not yet fulfilled, and by revealing himself to them prematurely he would have defeated the very purpose of his scheme, as outlined in the *comm.* to v. 9.

[And] he returned to them and spoke to them.

The ensuing conversation is not recorded. According to *R' Avraham ben HaRambam*, Joseph reassured them that his intent was not malicious. The implication of *R' Bachya* is that Joseph wanted them to designate which brother should remain behind, but when they refused, he selected Simeon for the reasons given below. [See footnote to v. 19, and cf. *Rambam*, *Yesodei HaTorah* 5:5 where it is derived that Jews are forbidden to designate one of their number to be handed over to Gentile marauders, even to save the entire group from death.]

וַיִּקַּח מֵאֵתָם אֶת-שָׁמְעוֹן — And he took Simeon from them.

Why did Joseph choose Simeon?

— It was Simeon who had thrown

1. See *Sefer Chassidim* #131: 'Know and understand that whoever commits murder or harms another person is not punished only for that individual, but also for everyone who grieves over that individual, as derived from the phrase וְגַם דָּמוֹ, also his blood, which extends the retribution for his father's grief as well as that of everyone else associated with his loss.'

42 Joseph understood for an interpreter was between
24-25 them.

²⁴ He turned away from them and wept. He returned to them and spoke to them; he took Simeon from them and imprisoned him before their eyes
²⁵ Joseph commanded that they fill their vessels with grain, and to return each one's money to his sack and

Joseph into the pit, and who had said to Levi, *Look! That dreamer is coming* [37:19]. Alternatively, he wished to separate Simeon from Levi lest the two of them conspire to kill him (*Rashi*).

[The latter interpretation follows a Midrashic explanation of why, if both Simeon and Levi instigated the plot against Joseph, (37:19), Joseph did not imprison both of them.]

— And lest the two of them form some conspiracy as they did in Shechem (*Rashbam*).

In reality, Reuben should have been selected because, as the first born, he was accountable for the deeds of his younger siblings. However, [as Joseph knew either from witnessing it at the time of the sale, or from overhearing Reuben's retort now in v. 22] Reuben had attempted to protect Joseph when his brothers wanted to kill him, so Joseph spared him and selected Simeon who was next in seniority (*Ibn Ezra*; *Tur*).

וַיֹּאסֶר אֹתוֹ לְעֵינֵיהֶם — And [he] imprisoned him before their eyes.

— To cause them to realize the seriousness of their plight. When they would see him interned, they would not procrastinate but would hasten back all the more quickly with their younger brother in order to free Simeon (*R' Avraham ben HaRambam*).

However, it was only before their eyes that Joseph kept him impris-

oned. As soon as they left Joseph freed him and gave him food and drink (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

— Simeon was not to know, however, that Joseph was aware of this (*Meam Loez*).

Midrash Tanchuma records that only Menasseh could restrain and bind Simeon; the soldiers of the guard were not able to subdue him. When Menasseh subdued him with only a single blow, Simeon remarked, 'Such a blow is [like that] of my father's household!'

וַיִּצְוּ יוֹסֵף וַיְמַלְאוּ אֹתָם כִּלְיָהֶם כֹּר — Then Joseph commanded that they [i.e. those in charge of dispensing grain] fill [lit. and they filled] their vessels with grain.

— [Presumably the reference is to the grain which the brothers had purchased for their households.]

Since Joseph did not want Simeon's family to go hungry while he was in prison, he ordered that Simeon's sack should also be filled. His brothers were to bring it to his family. Simeon's money, however, was not placed in his sack, but in Levi's (*Kesef Mezukak* cited in *Meam Loez*).

וְלִהְיוּ בְּכֶסֶף אִישׁ אֶל־שָׁקוֹ — [And] [=he gave orders (*Radak*)] to return each one's money [lit. silver] to his sack.

While the previous command was carried out by the officials in charge of the grain, this command

מקץ כו לדרך ויעש להם כן: וישאו את שברם
 מב/כו כו על חמריהם וילכו משם: ויפתח האהר
 את שקו לתת מספוא לחמרו במלון
 וירא את כספו והנה הוא בפי

was directed *secretly* to Menasseh who carried it out personally (*Midrash*).

Joseph intended thereby to provide atonement — measure for measure — for their having sold him. When they would discover their money they would worry that they would be arrested as thieves and sold as slaves. This was also one of the reasons he later used the goblet to fabricate evidence against him (*Kli Yakar; Abarbanel*).

The names of precious metals — gold, silver, etc. — never occur in the plural. The plural in our verse כספיהם, lit. *their silvers*, refers not to the metal but to the coins (*Sforno; Karnei Or*).

And to give them provisions for the journey. — וילתח להם צנה לדרך

So during their journey they would not have to eat what they had bought for their households. Joseph told them that he was graciously giving them provisions for the journey [and did not conceal it as he did the restoration of their monies (*R' Eisenstadt*)] because he wanted to demonstrate that he had no evil intentions, but merely wanted them to return with Benjamin so their claims could be verified (*Ramban*).

And so he [i.e. the person in charge of so doing] did for them. — ויעש להם כן

[The phrase is elliptic and, in usual Scriptural style, refers to an implied subject — the obvious one in charge of performing the act described. See *Rashi* to 41:13 s.v. השיב.]

According to the Midrash, as

noted, Menasseh did this and he is the subject of the phrase.

This phrase refers to the replacement of the money and the supplying of provisions for the journey. The filling of their vessels with grain was already described in the beginning of this verse (*Radak*).

26. וישאו את שברם על חמריהם — Then they loaded their purchases onto their donkeys.

The subject of this phrase is ambiguous. The *brothers* may have loaded the sacks that had been filled by Joseph's officials (v. 25) — in which case the brothers are the subject of both verbs in this verse (*loading and departing*). *Maasei Hashem* suggests that the loading was done by *Joseph's workers* to avoid the possibility that the brothers might notice the money were they to load the sacks themselves. The subject of the *departure*, of course, is the brothers.

And [they] departed from there. — וילכו משם

They left without delay after their donkeys were loaded. Were this not the implication of the quick succession of phrases, there would be no need for the Torah to report the obvious fact that they loaded their donkeys (*Or HaChaim*).

27. ויפתח האהר את שקו — When the one of them opened his sack.

The one of them — Levi. Now that he was separated from his companion Simeon, he was the one (*Rashi*).

This interpretation is based upon the

to give them provisions for the journey. And so he did for them. ²⁶ Then they loaded their purchase onto their donkeys and departed from there.

²⁷ When the one of them opened his sack to give feed to his donkey at the inn, he saw his money right there in the mouth of his sack. ²⁸ So he said to his

definite article *הַאֶחָד*, the one, indicating that the individual was in this case distinctive as being only one, a reference to Levi who was usually paired with Simeon (*Mizrachi; Tzeidah LaDerech*).

According to *Ibn Ezra*, it was probably the *foremost* [lit. one] among them — Reuben, the first born.

לָתֵת מִקְפּוֹא לְחִמְרוֹ בְּמִלּוֹן — To give feed to his donkey at the inn.

Ramban offers several interpretations of how it occurred that only one of the brothers discovered his money, while the others did not discover theirs until later [v. 25]:

— Possibly, the others took along *תֵּבָן*, straw [which is an inferior feed not affected by the famine] for their donkeys, and they therefore had no need to open their packs to feed them, while this brother had a weaker donkey which required *מִקְפּוֹא*, feed [i.e. a better mixture including grain (see *Radak* to 24:25)]. When he opened the sack to feed it, he found the money in the mouth of his pack.

— According to the implication of *Onkelos* who interprets *אֶמְתַּחֲתוֹ* as *his load* [see below], *Ramban* suggests that each donkey was loaded with several sacks to balance its load. Though several of the men may each have opened one of their sacks, only this one happened to find money in the particular sack he opened. His brothers then emptied their other sacks and found the rest of the money.

— Alternately, *Ramban* offers that each load consisted of a double-sided large sack, and that one brother happened to open that particular side where the money lay, while the others did not.

Rosh, cited by his son, the *Tur*, maintains, like *Rashi*, that it was Levi. He

was the first to discover the money because he led Simeon's donkey too, and since he had to feed both donkeys, he reached the bottom of his pack before the other brothers.

According to *Abarbanel* and *Malbim*, Joseph ordered that in the case of all the brothers except for Levi, the money be placed near the *bottom* of their packs. He purposely had Levi's money left closer to the mouth, so he would be the first to discover the money and be distressed even during the journey. The reason was that of the nine brothers, Levi was the most guilty for the sale [and this would provide atonement measure for measure].

This essentially follows the view of *Radak* who explains that Joseph did not make the monies in all their packs readily visible for fear that if all of them discovered the money during the journey they would have immediately returned to Egypt to restore the money and protest their innocence. He therefore ordered that the money of *one* of them be placed near the mouth in order to frighten them. He knew, however, that they would not return to Egypt because of a single discovery.

וַיֵּרָא אֶת־בִּסְפוֹ וְהִנֵּה־הוּא בְּפִי אֶמְתַּחֲתוֹ — [Then] he saw his money right there [lit. and behold it was] in the mouth of his sack.

He knew it was *his own money* — the money with which he had paid for his provisions — because it was tied up in his own bundle (*R' Avraham ben HaRambam*).

Rashi interprets *אֶמְתַּחֲתוֹ* as synonymous with the sack just mentioned.

Ramban explains it as referring to a large, double-sided sack, called *טַקְרָתָא* in Aramaic

כח אִמְתַּחֲתוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-אֶחָיו הוֹשֵׁב בְּסָפִי
וְגַם הִנֵּה בְּאִמְתַּחֲתִי וַיֵּצֵא לָבָם וַיַּחֲרֹדוּ
אִישׁ אֶל-אֶחָיו לֵאמֹר מָה זֹאת עֲשֵׂה
כט אֱלֹהִים לָנוּ: וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם
אֲרָצָה בְּנָעַן וַיִּגִּדּוּ לוֹ אֵת כָּל-הַקֶּרֶת
ל אֲתָם לֵאמֹר: דָּבָר הָאִישׁ אֲדֹנֵי הָאָרֶץ
אֲתָנוּ קָשׂוֹת וַיִּתֵּן אֲתָנוּ בְּמַרְגְּלִים אֶת-

[see *Kesubos* 110a and *Rashi* there]. Because it stretches [ימחך] at the sides while it is being filled, it is also called *אִמְתַּחֲתִי*.

Onkelos renders it *load*, referring to the total numbers of sacks loaded on each animal to equalize the weight.

According to *Malbim*, the term refers to a smaller pouch into which personal articles are kept, while *קָשׂוֹת* refers to the large bags where wheat and feed are kept.

28. הוֹשֵׁב בְּסָפִי וְגַם הִנֵּה בְּאִמְתַּחֲתִי —
My money has been returned and look! it, too, is in my sack!

His fright was greatest when he recognized the money as *his own* — so that he was vulnerable to a personal accusation. This was part of Joseph's scheme. He wanted the brothers to realize how fully they were in his power and that he could do as he pleased with them (*R' Hirsch*).

The word *וְגַם*, too, is somewhat superfluous in this verse. *Rashi* explains that it refers to the money in the sack in addition to the grain.

According to *Tzror HaMor*, *וְגַם*, too, [which indicates a *רְבִיב*, extension, beyond the literal scope of the clause (see v. 22 *קָמִי*)] intimates that he (*Levi*, see *Rashi* v. 27) found *Simeon's* money there too.

וַיֵּצֵא לָבָם — [And] *their hearts sank* [lit. *departed*].¹¹

[I.e., they felt faint at the

prospect that this returned money might imply some sinister plot on the part of Joseph; see below.]

According to an early commentator cited in *Torah Sheleimah* 891, they were afraid that Joseph intended to keep *Simeon* as a slave and the money was the price he had paid.

[The heart is figuratively depicted throughout Scripture as the seat of the intellect. Accordingly, *Onkelos* renders: *And the knowledge of their hearts departed*, and they became confounded. Cf. the metaphor in *Deut.* 29:3.]

— וַיַּחֲרֹדוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אֶחָיו לֵאמֹר — *And they turned trembling one to another, saying* [lit. *and they trembled, man to his brother, to say*].

[On the verb *חרד* tremble, cf. 27:33.]

— מָה-זֹּאת עֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים לָנוּ — *What is this that God has done to us?*¹²

The Divine Name used here, *Elohim*, refers to God in His Aspect as Dispenser of Strict Justice [see on 1:1]. *What is this that God*, in a display of His Aspect of Justice, *has done to us?* They knew — even in this moment of their distress — that this was no mere accident, but a calculated act of Providence (*Akei-*

1. In a touching aside, the Midrash records that when the Talmudic Sage *R' Shimon ben R' Zavdi* died, *R' Levi* was called upon to deliver the eulogy:

'Our Tribal Ancestors found an article [the money in their sacks], yet their hearts sank,' he lamented. 'How much greater should our anguish be at having lost *R' Shimon ben R' Zavdi*!'

brothers, "My money has been returned and look! it, too, is in my sack!" Their hearts sank and they turned trembling one to another saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

²⁹ They came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and they told him of all their experiences as follows, ³⁰ "The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly to us and considered us as if we were spying

das Yitzchak; R' Bachya). [See R' Munk cited in footnote to v. 19 above.]

— What is this that God has done to us—by bringing us into a situation of suspicion? For the money was returned only to furnish a pretext for a plot against us (*Rashi*).

— By inspiring this self-portrayed 'God-fearing' man to treat us in a way that will provide him with a fresh pretext on account of which he will be able to sell us as slaves. In this way we would be punished measure for measure for having sold Joseph. But this would not be a true measure for measure. We acted justifiably in self-defense [see comm. to 37:18] — and the fact that we sold rather than executed him was an act of compassion on our part (*Sforno*).

29. Their report to their father.

— וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם אֶרֶצָה כְּנָעַן — [And] they came to Jacob their father in [lit. to] the land of Canaan.

The land of Canaan is mentioned here because the locale of the narrative has changed; all the preceding had happened in Egypt (*Michlol Yofi*).

— וַיִּגִּידוּ לוֹ אֵת כָּל הַקֶּרֶת אֲשֶׁר לָאָמֶר — And they told him of all their ex-

periences [lit. all that had happened to them], as follows [lit. saying].

I.e., the following is exactly how the brothers related their experiences to Jacob. A comparison of the following *verbatim* recapitulation with the narrative above, however, will show they concealed certain things, minimizing the gravity of their dilemma as will be pointed out in the commentary (*Akeidah*; *Ralbag*).

This is further alluded to by the fact that the Torah spells the word הִקְרָת, experiences, deficiently, without the ו, *vav* [instead of הִקְוֹרֹת], to indicate that the brother's narrative of these events was also deficient. They did not tell Jacob *everything* that happened. They initially minimized the harshness of Joseph's ultimatums to spare him grief. They also knew that had Jacob heard how harshly Joseph had dealt with them, he would never, under any circumstances, have allowed Benjamin to return with them (*Alshich*; *Ralbag*).

30. דָּבַר הָאִישׁ אֶל־יְהוָה אֲתָנוּ קָשׁוּת — The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly to us.

[The noun אֲדֹנָי, lord, [lit. lords], is in the plural, but takes a singular

2. Commenting upon how, in their great distress, the brothers blamed God for a situation which they had brought upon themselves by selling Joseph, the Talmud (*Taanis* 9a) records the following:

R' Yochanan happened to come across Resh Lakish's young son reciting the verse in

מקץ לא הארץ: ונאמר אליו בנים אנחנו לא
 מב/לא-לה לב היינו מרגלים: שנים-עשר אנחנו אחים
 בני אבינו האחד איננו והקטן היום את-
 לב אבינו בארץ כנען: ויאמר אלינו האיש
 אדני הארץ בזאת אדע כי בנים אתם
 אדניכם האחד הניחו אתי ואת-רעבון
 לב בתיכם קחו ולכו: והביאו את-אחיכם
 הקטן אלי ואדעה כי לא מרגלים אתם
 לב כי בנים אתם את-אחיכם אתן לכם
 ואת-הארץ תסחרו: ויהי הם מריקים

verb *spoke*. See Rashi to 35:8 who explains that nouns denoting power or lordship often occur in plural. Cf. also 39:2.]

Sifre [Numbers 99] cites our verse to prove that the Hebrew verb for *speak* [דבר] always denotes harsh words. See Numbers 12:1.

And — ויתן אתנו במרגלים את הארץ
considered [lit. gave] us as if [we were] spying out the land.

The language they used to their aged father — במרגלים, *as if we were spying* [i.e., implying that he merely suspected them of being spies] — subtly concealed the true fact that the Egyptian was quite definite in his accusation (*Abarbanel*).

32. שנים-עשר אנחנו אחים בני אבינו
 — *We are twelve brothers, sons of our father.*]

האחד איננו והקטן היום את אבינו
 — *One is gone and the youngest is now* [lit. today] *with our father in the land of Canaan.*

Proverbs 19:3: *Man's foolishness perverts his way, yet his heart frets against HASHEM* [i.e., yet he blames God]. This inspired Resh Lakish to inquire where such a concept is intimated in the *Chumash* itself.

"Surely it is intimated," the child said to him, "in the verse, *And they turned trembling one to another saying 'What is this that God has done to us?'*"

In this recapitulation they reversed the order of v. 13 where the youngest was mentioned first and the missing one second. The subtle implication here to their father is that they were forced in the course of the dialogue to reveal that they had a younger brother — something they ordinarily would not have offered of their own volition, being sensitive to the probable consequences, and something they tried to keep secret as long as possible (*Tur; Akeidah*).

33. בזאת אדע כי בנים אתם — *By this I will ascertain whether you are truthful people.*

[Joseph's words were much harsher: *By this you shall be tested* (v. 15) ... *Do this and live* (v. 18). The brothers tactfully omitted all references and suggestions that their very lives depended on their acquiescence.]

אחיכם האחד הניחו אתי — *One of your brothers — leave with me.*

out the land. ³¹ But we said to him, 'We are truthful men: we have never been spies! ³² We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is gone and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.' ³³ Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I will ascertain whether you are truthful people: One of your brothers leave with me, and what is needed for the hunger of your households take and go. ³⁴ And bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies, but truthful people. I will restore your brother to you and you will be free to circulate about the land.' "

[Again, fearful of their father's reaction they concealed the harsh aspects of their encounter with the Egyptian ruler: The ordeal of their three days' imprisonment; that Joseph's actual words were, 'let one of your brothers be imprisoned in your place of confinement; and the fact that he bound Simeon before their eyes. It was, as noted above, their intention throughout to minimize the gravity of the situation, so Jacob would be less reluctant to send Benjamin.]

וְאֶת־רַעְבוֹן בְּתֵיכֶם קָחוּ וְלִבּוֹ — And [whatever is needed for] the hunger of your household — take and go.

The phrase רַעְבוֹן בְּתֵיכֶם, the hunger of your households, is clearly elliptical. The implication that the intended phrase is *whatever is needed* follows Ibn Janach and Ibn Ezra.

Targum renders this passage, as he did verse 19 above: 'and take the grain which is lacking in your households'.

34. וְהָבִיאוּ אֶת־אֶחָיֶכֶם הַקָּטָן אֵלַי וְאֶרְצָה כִּי לֹא מִדְּגִלִים אַתֶּם כִּי בָנִים אַתֶּם — And bring your youngest brother to me, so [lit. and]

I will know that you are not spies, but [you are] truthful people.

[They make this sound almost like a conciliatory request, omitting Joseph's implicit ultimatum, 'So your words will be verified and you will not die' (v. 20).]

אֶת־אֶחָיֶכֶם אֶתֶּן לָכֶם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ תִּסְחָרוּ — I will restore [lit. give] your brother [i.e., Simeon, whom you have left behind with me] to you, and you will [be free to] circulate about the land.

The translation of תִּסְחָרוּ as *to circulate about* rather than the familiar translation *to engage in trade* follows Rashi who offers that all expressions of סְחָרָה, merchandise, and סוֹחְרִים, merchants, are derived from the verb סָחַר which essentially means *going about*, because merchants circulate, looking for merchandise.

With this interpretation, Rashi avoids an obvious difficulty, for we do not find anywhere that Joseph had told the brothers that they would be free to trade in the land. Therefore, Rashi explains that Joseph promised them the right to circulate about the land and buy grain without hindrance. [We must assume that the brothers did not lie to Jacob. The implication of freedom to circulate

שָׁקִיָּהֶם וְהִנֵּה אִישׁ צָרוּר-כֶּסֶף בְּשָׁקוֹ
וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת-צָרָרוֹת כֶּסְפֵיהֶם הֵמָּה
וַאֲבִיהֶם וַיֵּירְאוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יַעֲקֹב
אֲבִיהֶם אֲתִי שְׂבִלְתֶּם יוֹסֵף אֵינְנוּ וְשִׁמְעוֹן
אֵינְנוּ וְאֶת-בְּנֵימָן תִּקְחוּ עָלֵי הֵיוּ כְלָנָה:

מקץ
מב/לו

through the land to buy grain unhindered was implicit in Joseph's promise of exoneration when they established their innocence). However, above in the story of Shechem *Rashi* did not offer his interpretation that the word וַיִּסְתָּרוּ in 34:21 means *circulate*, for there the subject of the discussion is actual *trade*; they were being offered a special dispensation not regularly offered to foreigners (see *comm.* there). Here, however, only freedom to *travel* the land is meant; therefore he offers his interpretation here and not above (*Ramban*).

Ramban maintains, however [as does *Onkelos* to our verse], that *trading* is the correct sense, although we do not find that Joseph had actually told this to the brothers. Accordingly he postulates that they altered Joseph's assurance 'for the sake of peace' by presenting a somewhat more optimistic picture to make Jacob more amenable towards allowing Benjamin to return with them. Possibly, Joseph *had* intimated that if they established their innocence, he would compensate for their embarrassment by granting them special trading privileges not normally granted foreigners [see 34:10]. However, just as there might have been other details of their dialogue which remained unrecorded, the Torah did not record this particular detail either, for as noted in v. 21, the Torah characteristically shortens a narrative in one place and elaborates on the details in another.

35. וַיְהִי הֵם מְרִיקִים שָׁקִיָּהֶם — *Then [lit. and] as they were emptying their sacks.*

This refers to the rest of the brothers; one of the brothers had already opened his sack at the inn and made the discovery earlier [v. 27] (*Radak*).

וְהִנֵּה אִישׁ צָרוּר-כֶּסֶף בְּשָׁקוֹ — *That behold! Every man's bundle of money was in his sack!*

It was unmistakably the very same bundles of money with which they had paid for the rations of grain that had now been (*Ralbag*).

וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת-צָרָרוֹת כֶּסְפֵיהֶם הֵמָּה וַאֲבִיהֶם וַיֵּירְאוּ — *And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were terrified.*¹⁾

They knew that the money in all their sacks could not possibly be an oversight. It was obvious that a plot was being implemented against them and they were terrified at its implications (*Alshich*).

Targum Yonasan interprets: And they were terrified on account of Simeon whom they had left behind.

36. אֲתִי שְׂבִלְתֶּם — *I am the one whom you bereaved!*

The term שְׂבִיל [bereft] refers to one who has lost his children (*Rashi*; cf. on 27:45).

1. In a deeper, Kabbalistic sense, this verse intimates that the brothers prophetically foresaw the destiny of the ten martyred Sages of Israel [עֲשָׂרָה הַרְוֵי מַלְכוּת] who would be killed centuries later in atonement for the ten brothers' sale of Joseph [see *comm.* to 37:28]. Thus, *they and their father perceived the troubles, troubles*, that would befall their descendants — as a result of כֶּסְפֵיהֶם, *their monies* [in the plural] alluding both to this returned money and the money they received when they sold Joseph — and they were terrified (*Paane'ach Raza*).

42 ³⁵ Then, as they were emptying their sacks,
35-36 behold! every man's bundle of money was in his sack. When they and their father saw their bundles of money they were terrified. ³⁶ Their father Jacob said to them, "I am the one whom you bereaved! Joseph is gone, Simeon is gone, and now you would take away Benjamin? Upon me has it all befallen!"

We derive from Jacob's remark that he suspected them of having slain or sold Simeon and that they may have done the same to Joseph (Rashi according to Gur Aryeh).

[That the unexpected wealth in their sacks aroused Jacob's suspicions that they had sold Simeon for the grain, and possibly led him to suspect that they had sold Joseph too, has basis in *Bereishis Rabbah* 91:9. However, Rashi's suggestion that Jacob suspected that they had slain Joseph needs clarification, especially in light of Jacob's later statement regarding Joseph (44:28): אַךְ עָרַף טָרַף, surely he is torn in pieces (a Hebrew expression used exclusively of one mangled by wild beasts; not one murdered by human agency)].

[Actually, as Tzeidah laDerech points out, it is not Jacob speaking in 44:28; rather, the speaker is Judah quoting Jacob. He postulates that just as in 44:20 Rashi suggests that Judah mistated a fact out of fear, the expression surely he is torn in pieces might also be an example of such a misquote, and in fact, while Jacob did not explicitly mention it, he did indeed harbor an inner suspicion that both Joseph and Simeon were victims of foul play. (Cf. *Gur Aryeh*; *Be'er Yitzchak*. See, for example, v. 38 below where Jacob uses the expression for his brother is dead.)

יוסף איננו ושמעון איננו וְאֶת־בְּנֵימִין יִסָּף — Joseph is gone [lit. is not], [and] Simeon is gone [lit. is not], and [now] you would take away Benjamin!

— Who knows what misfortune will befall him? (R' Bachya).

1. When Rebecca instructed Jacob to deceive Isaac into giving him the blessings, Jacob expressed the fear that he would be discovered and incur Isaac's curse. To this, Rebecca responded עָלֶיךָ בֵּן קִלְעָתְךָ, your curse be on me, my son [27:13].

The word עָלֶיךָ is interpreted homiletically as the initials of the three names יוסף, לָבָן, עֵשָׂו, Esau, Laban, Joseph. Rebecca was intimating that Jacob would suffer only in connection with those three. Remembering that promise, Jacob now bemoaned his plight: Joseph and Simeon

— The Egyptian might accuse him also of spying! (*Abarbanel*).

Although the expression אֵינְנוּ, is gone, is used for both Joseph and Simeon, the connotations are not the same. Onkelos accordingly renders: Joseph is not and Simeon is not here.

Targum Yonasan paraphrases the sense: 'Of Joseph you said, An evil beast has devoured him; of Simeon you said, The king of the land has bound him; and Benjamin you seek to take away!'

According to the Talmud [*Chullin* 95b], Jacob was worried that should anything happen to Benjamin, this third misfortune would portend that endless calamities awaited him henceforth. [Cf. Rashi and R' Gershom there.]

As R' Hirsch explains Jacob's response: 'You cannot hold my refusal against me. Though I do not know what happened to them, I am the one now bereft of Joseph and Simeon. And since both suffered misfortune under similar circumstance — when they were among you — I have no right to place a third son in such jeopardy. For (as the Sages teach in *Chullin* 95b) although we may not be superstitious, we may take note of 'signs' regarding houses, children, and wives'.

עָלַי הָיוּ כָּלֵהָ — Upon me has it all befallen.

— All, i.e. all of these disasters (*Ibn Ezra*).⁽¹⁾

מקץ לֹא
מב/לז-לח וַיֹּאמֶר רְאוּבֵן אֶל-אָבִיו לֵאמֹר אֶת-שְׁנֵי
בְנֵי תָמִית אִם-לֹא אָבִיָּאנוּ אֵלֶיךָ תָּנָה
לח אֶתוֹ עַל-יְדֵי וְאֲנִי אֲשִׁיבָנּוּ אֵלֶיךָ: וַיֹּאמֶר
לֹא-יִרְדּוּ בְנֵי עִמְכֶם כִּי-אֲחִיו מָתָה וְהוּא

Not necessarily these in particular, but in general: I have experienced all kinds of disasters in my lifetime (*Heidenheim*).

— *Upon me has it all befallen*, i.e., the tragedy of the loss of children affected primarily *me*, the father. This sense of *עָלַי*, *upon me*, as meaning *primarily affecting me*, is similar to 48:7: מָתָה עָלַי רָחֵל, *Rachel died 'upon' me*, i.e., her death affected primarily *me* [Jacob], for as the Sages teach, 'a woman dies for none but her husband' (*Sechel Tov*).

Thus, your grief as brothers, cannot compare with mine as a father! (*Akeidah*).

— Such tragedies have not happened to *your* children, but to mine. Undoubtedly, the cause is your quarrels with each other, and I regard you as the indirect cause of my bereavement (*Sforno*).

According to *Malbim*, the meaning is different: The blame for all of their misfortune is upon me. I caused Joseph's death by sending him into danger, and I will be similarly held accountable for Simeon's and Benjamin's deaths for allowing them to go to a place of danger, and I dread the punishment in store for me in consequence of this.

The *Midrash* interprets: Upon me has devolved the duty of begetting the Twelve Tribes, and I have

reared them; but now that their number is diminished I am as one utterly bereft (*Lekach Tov*).

37. Reuben's Proposal.

וַיֹּאמֶר רְאוּבֵן אֶל אָבִיו לֵאמֹר — *Then Reuben said to his father as follows* [lit. saying].

As the firstborn, he felt it his duty to speak up (*Abarbanel*).

אֶת-שְׁנֵי בְנֵי תָמִית אִם-לֹא אָבִיָּאנוּ אֵלֶיךָ — *You may slay my two sons if I fail to bring him [Benjamin] back to you* [lit. if I do not take him to you.]

The commentators agree that this was not meant literally:

Reuben spoke figuratively, in the sense of obligating himself under the penalty of a curse (*Ramban*).

— You may slay my two sons with a curse (*Targum Yonasan*). *Onkelos*, too, uses the verb *תָּמִית* which he employs throughout Scripture only when the sense is *death at the hands of Heaven* [the meaning here accordingly being: *Bring about his death by cursing him*]. When *Onkelos* speaks of murder, he uses the verb *קָטַל* (*Nesinah l'Ger*).

Reuben thereby uttered a curse that his two sons should die if he should fail to return Benjamin. See incident of Rav and Shmuel related in *Shabbos* 108a (*Sforno*).

According to *Tosafos HaRosh* the implication was: *May you consider them as dead and disinherited if I fail* (*HaKsav V'Hakabbalah*).

Ibn Ezra cites two interpretations: (a) *slay*, i.e. punish [by excommunication (*Karnei Or*)]; (b) this was not said to

were already gone; Benjamin might be endangered, too — what had happened to Rebecca's promise that Jacob's only misfortune would be those represented by the word *עָלַי*? (*Vilna Gaon*).

37 Then Reuben said to his father as follows, "You may slay my two sons if I fail to bring him back to you. Put him in my care and I will return him to you."

38 But he said, "My son shall not go down with

Jacob, but in Jacob's presence as a prayer to God [that He take the children's life away] if Reuben does not bring Benjamin back.

Avos d'Rabbi Nosson [quoted in *Torah Sheleimah* #102] cites Reuben as an example of 'a fool who asks improperly.' For was Jacob our Father a murderer? Reuben's crass suggestion did not even deserve an answer from Jacob.

Following *Malbim* [end of last verse] according to whom Jacob was expressing fear of the consequences to himself should he expose Benjamin to danger, Reuben now answered: 'The sin shall devolve upon me; let this sin take the lives of my two sons' [תָּמִיתִי being here interpreted in the third pers. fem. passive — let her (the sin) kill] — if I do not, etc.

אֶת שְׁנֵי בָנֵי — *My two sons.*

I.e., two of my sons, for he had a total of four [Chanoch, Phalu, Chetzron, Carmi (see 46:9)] (*Radak*). He mentioned two in the sense of double: In retribution for harm that may come to one of your sons, punishment may befall two of my sons if I fail to bring Benjamin back (*Ramban*).

Sifsei Kohen maintains that Reuben's offer of two was the *quid pro quo* for Jacob's two sons: *Sim-eon and Benjamin*, for Reuben obligated himself to return with both of them.

תָּנָה אֹתוֹ עַל־יָדִי וְנָתַנִּי אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ אֵלָיֶךָ — Put him in my care [lit. upon my hand] and I will return him to you.

Reuben had this confidence in himself because he knew he was

guiltless in the affair of selling Joseph, and of all the brothers he would be the most likely to succeed in this mission (*Or HaChaim*).

38. Jacob does not respond to Reuben's offer directly. Instead, he addressed his rejection to his sons as a group.

לֹא־יֵרֵד בְּנֵי עִמְכֶם — *My son shall not go down with you* ['you' is in plural].

Thus, Jacob summarily rejected Reuben's offer. 'He is a fool, this eldest son of mine,' Jacob declared. 'He suggests that I should kill his sons. Are not his sons also my sons!' (*Rashi*).

Although Jacob refused Reuben's offer, he later entrusted Judah with the mission (43:9-13) because he was confident that Judah's great influence with his brothers would assure their cooperation in bringing back Benjamin no matter how great the difficulty. Moreover, Reuben had already sinned against Jacob [in the matter of Bilhah (35:22)] and Jacob would no longer rely on him. Furthermore, the timing of Judah's offer was better conceived; he left his father alone until there was no more food in the house [see below 43:8] (*Ramban*).

[The reasons Jacob gave here for refusing Reuben's offer were sincere, quite valid, and applied equally to Judah's. Nevertheless Jacob acceded to Judah's request because he had more confidence in him and because the timing of his offer was more propitious.]

Sforno notes how Jacob referred to Benjamin as *my son* — the only one left of his mother who had been the cornerstone of the household.

לְבָדוֹ נִשְׁאָר וְקָרָאָהּ אֶסּוֹן בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר
תִּלְכּוּ-בָּהּ וְהוֹרִדְתֶּם אֶת-שִׁיבְתִּי בִּיגוֹן
שְׂאוֹלָהּ: וְהָרַעַב כְּבֹד בְּאֶרֶץ: וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר
כָּלוּ לֵאכֹל אֶת-הַשֶּׂכֶר אֲשֶׁר הֵבִיאוּ
מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם אֲבִיהֶם שְׂבו
שְׁבוּ-לָנוּ מֵעַט-אֲכָל: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו

For his brother is dead [or: has died] and he alone is left.

For his brother, i.e. his full brother, Joseph, from the same mother, is dead, and he alone — of that mother — is left (Ralbag).

Jacob thus expressed his rationale for showing greater concern for Benjamin, whom danger might befall, than for Simeon, who was languishing in an Egyptian prison and whose life would *certainly* be in danger if all his brothers did not return to Egypt to redeem him. Accordingly, Jacob emphasized Benjamin's uniqueness: He is the only one whose full brother had died, and his loss would, in a sense, be greater than that of Simeon, since Benjamin was the only survivor of his mother while Simeon had five brothers (Or HaChaim).

— וְקָרָאָהּ אֶסּוֹן בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר תִּלְכּוּ-בָּהּ
And should disaster befall [lit. call; see v. 4] him on the journey which you shall take [lit. on the road that you shall walk on it].

... Which is highly likely since 'the Satan accuses in time of danger,' i.e., there is greater danger on a hazardous road than at home (see Rashi v. 4 s.v. פָּן).

The Hebrew literally reads: And disaster will call him on the journey, etc. Jacob was agonizing: I am certain he will be harmed on the

way; how will you be able to save him from sudden danger? (Akeidah).

— וְהוֹרִדְתֶּם אֶת-שִׁיבְתִּי בִּיגוֹן שְׂאוֹלָה
Then you will have brought down my hoariness [lit. white hair, white head; metaphorically old age] in sorrow to the grave [Hebrew: she'ol].

—Since I will never cease mourning. Benjamin is Rachel's only survivor; while he is with me I find consolation for the loss of his mother and brother; if he should die it will seem to me as though the three of them died on the same day (see Rashi 44:29).

Comp. also Rashi to 37:35 where the Midrashic implication is that שְׂאוֹל refers to Gehinnom, and Jacob was bemoaning that by the loss of his son he will experience Divine punishment in the afterlife. For Jacob had a tradition that as long as none of his sons died during his lifetime, he was assured that he would never experience such punishment.

The word שְׂאוֹל, lower-world refers to the depths of the earth, the opposite of the heavens which are the heights (Ibn Ezra to Jonah 2:3). Metaphorically, as Rashi notes in 37:35 it refers to the depths of the grave, the place of the dead. According to the Zohar [III:285] She'ol is one of the levels of Gehinnom. It is often used figuratively to indicate spiritual distress [for example, Psalms 18:5].

you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. Should disaster befall him on the journey which you shall take, then you will have brought down my hoariness in sorrow to the grave."

The famine was severe in the land. ² When they had finished eating the provisions which they had brought from Egypt their father said to them, "Go back, buy us some food." ³ But Judah said to him as

XLIII

1. The brothers return to Egypt

וְהָרָעָב בְּבֵר בְּאֶרֶץ — [And] the famine was severe in the land.

I.e. it grew more severe (Ralbag).

The land in this context, refers to the land *par excellence* — Eretz Yisrael (Akeidah).

According to Midrash HaGadol, earth in our verse refers to the whole world, and this passage is cited among nine others proof verses to indicate that famine had gripped the whole world ten times.

2. בָּאָשֶׁר כָּלוּ לֵאכֹל אֶת־הַשֶּׁבֶר — When they [i.e., Jacob's family] had finished eating the provisions [lit. purchase].

— Depleting whatever they had left (Rashi). Possibly they remained with only enough to last until they could make a trip to Egypt and back (Or HaChaim).

Judah had advised his brothers to wait and leave the Patriarch alone until the household ran out of food — for then he would be more disposed to consent to Benjamin's going (Rashi; Ramban 42:37).

— That is why Judah did not speak immediately after Jacob rejected Reuben's offer. Out of respect to their aged father, they did not press him, but they made do with a little and waited until the famine became more severe and their survival would demand that Jacob

allow Benjamin to go with them (Gur Aryeh; Tzeidah laDerech).

Rashi notes that Onkelos renders בָּאָשֶׁר כָּלוּ בְּרֵעֵיאוּ כָּלוּ [when they had finished, i.e., completely depleted their supplies, no more food being left]. Some Temanite manuscripts preserve a version in Onkelos where this phrase is rendered בְּרֵעֵיאוּ כָּלוּ [i.e., when they had enough (intimating, contrary to the above, that they ate sufficiently for their needs, and not that they were lacking in remaining supplies)]. Rashi maintains that the latter version is incorrect. He explains that in 24:22, when the camels had finished [בָּאָשֶׁר כָּלוּ] drinking, Onkelos rightly renders בְּרֵעֵיאוּ כָּלוּ since the context implies that the camels had drunk sufficiently for their thirst. Here, however, the reference is to total consumption, and the correct Aramaic for this connotation is בְּרֵעֵיאוּ כָּלוּ.

אֲשֶׁר הֵבִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם — Which they had brought from Egypt.

It is conceivable that this otherwise superfluous phrase intimates that only the food they had brought from Egypt was now depleted; they were now dependent upon whatever reserves Jacob had put away against the famine (Or HaChaim).

שָׁבוּ שָׂבוּ לָנוּ מִצֵּט אֲכָל — Go back, buy us some food.

How could Jacob tell them to do this after having been apprised of the Egyptian viceroy's condition that they dare not return without Benjamin?

יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר הָעֵד הָעַל בָּנוּ הָאִישׁ
לֵאמֹר לֹא־תֵרְאוּ פָנַי בְּלִתִּי אֲחִיכֶם
אֲתֶכֶם: אִם־יִשָּׁךְ מִשְׁלַח אֶת־אֲחִינוּ אֲתָנוּ
נִרְדָּה וְנִשְׁבְּרָה לָךְ אֶכֶל: וְאִם־אֵינָךְ
מִשְׁלַח לֹא נִרְדָּה כִּי־הָאִישׁ אָמַר אֲלֵינוּ
לֹא־תֵרְאוּ פָנַי בְּלִתִּי אֲחִיכֶם אֲתֶכֶם:
וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמָה הִרְעַתָּם לִי לְהִגִּיד
לְאִישׁ הָעֵד לָכֶם אַח: וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׂאוּל

Jacob's emphasis is on **מעט אכל**, a little food: He reasoned that perhaps if they returned to purchase only a small amount of food, the viceroy would not notice them (*Sechel Tov*).

Sforno suggests that Jacob did not believe their story. He suspected that they only wanted an opportunity to take Benjamin in order to do away with him like Joseph. Jacob implied his suspicions when he said, *I am the one whom you bereaved* [42:37; see *Rashi* there].

3. — וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר. — But [lit. and] *Judah said to him as follows* [lit. saying].

[Again it is Judah, as in 37:26 ff, who speaks the decisive word after a futile suggestion from Reuben.]

הָעֵד הָעַר בָּנוּ הָאִישׁ — *The man sternly* [or: repeatedly] *warned us* [the Hebrew idiom is in the emphatic infinitive compound: *warn he has warned us*].

The reference is to the solemn oath that Joseph had taken in 42:15ff, threatening them with death (ibid. verses 18, 20).

In this context, the word **העיד** [derived from the verb **עיד**, to bear witness] denotes warning, since a warning is generally given in the presence of witnesses. Comp. *Jeremiah* 11:7 *העדתי באבותיכם*, *I have persistently warned*

your fathers; *Exodus* 19:21: *go down warn the people* (*Rashi*).

In addition to giving testimony, Jewish witnesses have the additional responsibility of warning someone before he commits a crime and making him aware of the law. Thus, the expression **העיד ב** can refer either to giving evidence against someone *after* the deed, or warning him *before* the deed. Here it is the latter. The doubled verb **העיד העיד** implies that Joseph had warned them at the outset and again when they left that they should not dare to return without Benjamin (*R' Hirsch*).

— לֹא־תֵרְאוּ פָנַי בְּלִתִּי אֲחִיכֶם אֲתֶכֶם — *You dare not see my face unless your brother is with you.*

— He will not allow us to see him at all; he is in charge of the food and it will be impossible to buy even a little grain (*Sechel Tov*).

[Judah now quoted the Egyptian viceroy in stronger terms than the brothers used earlier in their recapitulation (42:34). Originally, they minimized the harshness of their predicament in order to spare Jacob grief, and to give him less reason to oppose Benjamin's return with them. Now, however, they realized that only extreme urgency would make Jacob consent; the situation demanded unabashed candor.]

The term **בלתי** means either *except* as above in 21:26, or *unless*, as in our verse. *Rashi* notes that *Onkelos* renders our pas-

follows, "The man sternly warned us saying, 'You dare not see my face unless your brother is with you.'

⁴ If you are ready to send our brother with us we will go down and buy you food. But if you do not send, we will not go down for the man said to us, 'You dare not see my face unless your brother is with you.' "

⁶ Then Israel said, "Why did you treat me so ill by telling the man that you had another brother?"

sage אלהין בר אחוכון עמכון *except when your brother is with you* [adding the word *בר*, when, to which there is no corresponding word in the Hebrew.] Accordingly, *Rashi* offers that while *Onkelos* correctly interpreted the sense of the matter, he was not particular to translate it literally [as *unless*, a translation which would not require additional words. See *Mizrachi*; *Divrei David*].

4. אם ישרך משלח את אחינו אתנו — *If you are ready* [lit. *if you have it* (i.e. if you have it within you; intend) see comm. to 24:42] to send [lit. sending] our brother with us.

כל — נרדה ונשברה לך אכל — *We will go down and buy [for] you food.*

— I.e. *for you*, as the Patriarch upon whom the entire household depends (*Ralbag*).

The suffix *ה* in *נרדה ונשברה* rather than *נרד ונשבר* [in addition to being a polite form (see on 27:19)] denotes frequency of action: If you are ready to send our brother with us *we will go down and buy you food* — even many times. But [next verse] if you do not send him, *we will not go down even once* — [*ה* occurs without the suffix *ה*] (*Tur*).

5. ואם אינך משלח לא נרד — *But if you do not send* [lit. *but if you are not sending*], *we will not go down.*

כי האיש אמר אלינו ובר — *For the man said to us, 'You dare not see my face unless your brother is with you.'*

Judah repeated this [from v. 3] to emphasize the gravity of the threat.

It was not simply a matter of a warning which they dare ignore, out of honor to their father, by returning without Benjamin. The man made it clear that their returning without Benjamin would be futile; they would not be able to see him, nor would they be able to procure food. Therefore, Judah maintained, it was purposeless to return (cf. *Malbim*; *Haamek Davar*).

6. ויאמר ישראל — *Then* [lit. and] *Israel said.*

As noted, Israel is the name used to depict Jacob in his spiritual role as Patriarch of the Jewish nation.

In this case, he is referred to as Israel, because he offered them a teaching for future generations. Whenever Jews are forced to appear before hostile rulers, they should not offer more information than the question requires (*Haamek Davar*).

למה הרעתם לי להגיד לאיש העור לך — *Why did you treat me so ill by telling* [lit. *to tell*] *the man that you had another brother?*

— You spoke unnecessarily by telling him things he did not ask, things which had nothing to do with the charge of spying. Your mentioning that you had a younger brother at home was superfluous and is causing me anguish (*Abarbanel*; *Alshich*).

The prefix *ה* in *העור* [lit. *the another*] does

שאל-הָאִישׁ לָנוּ וּלְמוֹלְדָּתָנוּ לֵאמֹר
הָעוֹד אֲבִיכֶם חַי הִישׁ לָכֶם אֶחַ וְנִגְדָּלוּ
עַל־פִּי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הִידוּעַ גִּדַּע כִּי
ח יֵאמֹר הוֹרִידוּ אֶת־אֲחֵיכֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר
יְהוֹדָה אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיו שְׁלַחָה הַנָּעַר
אֶתִּי וְנִקְוָמָה וְנִלְכָּה וְנַחֲיָה וְלֹא נָמוֹת

not indicate a question here as it does in the next verse. Here it is the definite article introducing a statement (*Haamek Davar*).

7. וַיֹּאמְרוּ. — [And] they said.

— Speaking as a group, they defended themselves against Jacob's charge that they had loose tongues (*Akeidah*).

שָׂאוֹל שָׁאֵל הָאִישׁ — *The man [persistently] asked* [the Hebrew is in the emphatic infinitive compound; literally: *the man ask, asked*].

We did not offer him unnecessary information. His investigation was exhaustive and he demanded information about the minutest details of our lives. We *had* to tell him that we are all sons of the same father in order to escape the charge of being spies. As a result, he asked if we had another brother. He implied nothing sinister. That we innocently told him about Benjamin was in reply to a direct question (*Abarbanel*). These particular questions were not asked harshly, like his other accusations, but in a spirit of friendship. Such questions deserve a forthright reply, especially since there was nothing suspicious about them (*Haamek Davar*).

לָנוּ וּלְמוֹלְדָּתָנוּ — *About us and [about] our relatives.*

— I.e., *about our family* [as distinct from other contexts where the term מוֹלֶדֶת, means *birthplace*, a

meaning it could not have here since they had immediately told Joseph they were from Canaan.] Midrashically [the ambiguous term מוֹלֶדֶת (connoting *birth; childhood*) instead of מִשְׁפָּחָה, *family*, (*Gur Aryeh*)] denotes that he even told us what kind of wood our cradles [we slept on as יְלָדִים, *children*] were made of (*Rashi*).

[The sense of the Midrash is that the man kept asking questions about the most intimate details of our lives: even of what wood our cradles were made. Or the sense is: The viceroy had mystical powers. He was able to describe our house to the minutest detail, and even told us what kind of wood was used to make the cradles we slept on as children! In asking about our father and brother he was merely testing us to see if we would tell him the truth; we therefore *had* to tell him! (see *Yafeh Toar*).]

הָעוֹד אֲבִיכֶם חַי הִישׁ לָכֶם אֶחַ — *Is your father still alive? have you a brother?*

These questions are not recorded in the original account in chapt. 42.

Ramban [42:34] postulates that: (a) this constituted an excuse to Jacob [and did not entirely reflect the actual exchange with Joseph]; or more likely (b) when they told Joseph [42:11] *all of us, sons of one man are we*, and he countered with [v. 12], *No, but to see the land in its nakedness you have come*, he then proceeded to ask them about their

⁷ And they said, "The man persistently asked about us and our relatives, saying, 'Is your father still alive? have you a brother?' and we responded to him according to these words. Could we possibly have known that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'"

⁸ Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the lad with me, and let us arise and go, so we will live

father and brother, threatening to send back investigators to test their truthfulness. It was then that they gave the information about their father and brother [ibid. v. 13]. Judah made reference to such interrogation when he later said to Joseph (44:19), *My lord asked his servants, Have you a father or a brother?* That the Torah left this unrecorded above is in keeping with Scriptural style which is concise in one place regarding a narrative, and expansive in another. [See also Ramban to 42:21 and Rashbam ibid v. 12].

וַנִּגְדֹּל עֲלֵיפִי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה — *And we responded [lit. told] to him according to these words.*

I.e., and we responded — that we had a father and a brother; according to these words, i.e. to the questions he asked, by which it was mandatory that we give the information (*Rashi*).

[Or, according to the implication of *Yafeh Toar* above: *By the way he asked* — displaying such intimate mystical knowledge of our lives, and intimating that he knew the answers but was asking us merely

to test our truthfulness — we had to answer him.]

According to *Haamek Davar*: According to these words — which were so friendly and seemingly sincere.

הִדְּוָע נִגְדָה כִּי יֹאמֶר הוֹרִידוּ אֶת אֲחִיכֶם — *Could we possibly have known [idiomatic; the Hebrew is in the compound infinitive: know, could we have known] that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?*

According to the Sages in *Rosh Hashanah* 3a (see footnote to 28:15), the word כי has four meanings: *if; perhaps; but; because*. Here, however, *Rashi* renders it as אשר, *that*, explaining that one of the four basic meanings of כי is אם, [if], which, as noted in 24:33, is also synonymous with אשר, *when*. Accordingly, כי, in certain contexts such as ours, has the meaning of *when* (כי=אשר), but this as *Rashi* insists, is not to be construed as a fifth meaning of the word.

8. נִיאָמַר וַיהוָה אֶל יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִיו — *Then [lit. and] Judah said to Israel his father.*¹¹

— [I.e., as a son talking to his father.]

שְׁלַח הַנֶּעֱר וְנִקְוָה וְנִלְכָה — *Send the lad with me, and let us arise*

1. [The name Israel, here as above, emphasizes the eternal spiritual aspect of Jacob as Patriarch of the "Children of Israel." On the threshold of the Egyptian Exile, Judah spoke with a vision of Jewish eternity which would survive all the rigors of future persecution and exile.

Judah's assurance to Jacob can be understood to have very broad implications: "I will be responsible for your progeny in all their millennia of exile; and we will endure every travail and not die!" For the primary survivors of Jewish nationhood after the dispersion of the Ten Tribes were the descendants of Judah, Benjamin and the priestly tribe of Levi.]

מקץ מג/ט-י
 ט גַם-אֲנַחְנוּ גַם-אַתָּה גַם-טַפּוֹנוּ: אֲנֹכִי
 אֶעֱרַבְנּוּ מִיָּדִי תִּבְקָשׁנוּ אִם-לֹא הִבִּיאתִיו
 אֵלֶיךָ וְהִצַּגְתִּיו לְפָנֶיךָ וְחָטַאתִי לָךְ כָּל-
 הַיָּמִים: כִּי לֹא הִתְמַהֲמְהוּ כִּי-עָתָה

[idiomatic for *set out*], and go.

The imperative suffix *ה* in *שְׁלַח*, *send*, in place of the usual imperative form *שְׁלַח*, denotes a polite request rather than an order (*HaKsav VeHakabbalah*; cf. *comm.* to *שְׁלַח* in 27:19).

נְחִיָּה — So [lit. and] we will live.

In the literal sense: by having food (*Sforno*).

Rashi offers a Midrashic interpretation: The Divine Spirit was enkindled within him, and he unconsciously prophesied: 'As a sequel of this journey, *תְּחִי רוּחְךָ, your own spirit will be revived.*' Indeed such was the case, as it is said [45:27], *And the spirit of Jacob their father was revived.*

וְלֹא נָמוּת — And [we will] not die.

— Of hunger. [The essence of Judah's argument was]: If Benjamin does go with us it is doubtful whether or not he will be seized; but as for us, we will all *certainly* die of hunger if we do not go. It is better that you disregard the doubtful and come to grips with the certainty (*Rashi* from *Tanchuma*).

Comp. *Bereishis Rabbah*: Better that one life be risked than that all *certainly* die.

According to *Sforno*: *If we take Benjamin to Egypt, our trip will be a success and we will not die* at the hands of the viceroy who warned us [42:20]: *So your words will be verified and you will not die.*

וְגַם אֲנַחְנוּ גַם אַתָּה גַם טַפּוֹנוּ — We as

well as you as well as our children [lit. *also we, also you, also our children*].

It is usual for Scripture to precede even the first noun of a comparative phrase with *גַּם*, *also*, for emphasis. Comp. *Judges* 8:22 (*Radak*; *Ibn Ezra*; see *Neter*).

Exegetically, *גַּם*, *also*, is considered a *רְבִיז*, a particle which extends the meaning of a passage beyond the things specified in the text. In this case, *Midrash HaGadol* comments that the implied extensions are: *also we* — including our wives; *also you* — including your wives; *also our children* — including our flocks.

9. אֲנֹכִי אֶעֱרַבְנּוּ מִיָּדִי תִּבְקָשׁנוּ — I will personally [implied by the emphatic form *אֲנֹכִי*, lit. *it is I who will*, etc.] guarantee him; of my own hand you can demand him.

I will do everything humanly possible to guard him from heat, cold, evil beasts, and brigands. I will offer my life for his and muster up whatever means to assure his absolute safety. I *alone* will be responsible for him; if you charged us all with joint responsibility, each may leave it to the other. Furthermore, do not worry that he may suffer from a libelous charge that may arise from the monies returned in our sacks; Benjamin was not with us at the time (*B'chor Shor*).

I *personally* will be security. I offer myself, not my children, as security (*Abarbanel*).

Judah's guarantee was not necessarily

and not die, we as well as you as well as our children.
 9 — I will personally guarantee him; of my own hand you can demand him. If I do not bring him back to you and stand him before you, then I will have sinned to you for all time. — 10 For had we not delayed

that he would be able to *physically* overcome any natural danger and bring Benjamin home safely. The sense of his obligation was, 'I will bear responsibility to accept Divine punishment in his stead in the event of danger' (*Haamek Davar*).

According to R' Hirsch, Judah's intent was: 'The lingering suspicion that you have against all of us [regarding Joseph's disappearance], will rest solely on me with regard to Benjamin'.

Bava Basra 173b rules that *עֲרֵב קֶבֶלָן*, a guarantor who accepted unconditional obligation, is responsible for the debt he has guaranteed [merely by virtue of his verbal undertaking, though he had not made a *kin-yān* (a formal act legally concluding the obligation; *Rashi ad. loc.*). The Talmud derives the law from our passage, and cites 42:37. According to others, a guarantor's responsibility is derived from *Proverbs* 20:16. [See *Maharsha*; cf. *Torah Temimah*.]

אם לא הביאתי אליך והצגתי לפניך — If [through my negligence (*B'chor Shor*)] I do not bring him back to you and stand him before you.

I.e., alive. I will not bring him back to you dead but alive (*Rashi*).

[The verb *נָצַח* means *stand*, or *set up*, as above, 30:38.] *Rashi's* comment is based on

the fact that only the living can be 'stood up' (*Mizrachi*).

וְהָטַחְתִּי לְךָ כֹּל הַיָּמִים — Then [lit. and] I will have sinned to you for all time [lit. all the days].

— Even in the World to Come [which is wholly 'day' (*Midrash*)] (*Rashi*).

I will regard myself as a sinner and under a ban all my life (*Radak*).¹¹

10. כִּי לֹא הִתְמַחְנוּ — For had we not delayed.

— Because of you (*Rashi*).

Although Judah did not mention Jacob as being responsible for the delay, that was the implication of his remark; otherwise, what was the purpose of making this complaint? (*Mizrachi*).

The term *לֹא* is a composite of *לֹא* if only not. Cf. *לֹא* in 31:42. The *Midrash* notes that this term is used to introduce prayers for God's protection and care accorded through the merit of the Patriarchs. In our context, too, their merit was being invoked, since without it the brothers would not have left Egypt safely.

1. The Sages [*Makkos* 11b] teach that a ban — even if only conditional and self-imposed — requires formal abrogation. This is known from the fate of Judah who imposed this conditional ban upon himself and he remained subject to it throughout all his life — [and even after his death] — because no one ever formally absolved him of it.

On this theme, R' Shmuel bar Nachmeni cited R' Yochanan who said, What is implicit in Moses' words [*Deut.* 33:6-7] *Hear HASHEM the voice of Judah and bring him to his people?* ... During the entire forty years in the wilderness, Judah's bones rolled about in their coffin until Moses arose and supplicated for mercy on his behalf [the prayer, in effect finally absolving him of the ban].

Tosafos ad. loc. asks why indeed, Judah's ban needed abrogation, when other bans are automatically abrogated upon fulfillment of the condition. The answer given is that the fulfillment of the condition was not in Judah's control since it depended upon Joseph or upon no accident befalling Benjamin. In such a case the ban remains in effect until formally absolved; if, however, the fulfillment of the condition is in the power of the one who imposed it, the ban is nullified upon fulfillment of the condition.

מקץ מג/יא
 יא שָׁבְנוּ זֶה פַּעַמַּיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל
 אֲבִיהֶם אִם-כֵּן | אֲפואַ זֹאת עָשׂו קָחוּ
 מִזְמַרַת הָאָרֶץ בְּכָלֵיכֶם וְהוֹרִירוּ לְאִישׁ
 מִנְּחָה מַעֲט צָרִי וּמַעֲט דָּבָשׁ נָכֹאת וְלֹט

פַּעַמַּיִם — *We could have by now returned twice.*

I.e., we could have been there and back twice by this time (*Ralbag*).

I.e., we would since have long returned with Simeon and you would not have had such anxiety all this time (*Rashi*).

11. Jacob acquiesces.^[1]

יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיהֶם — *Israel their father.*

He is referred to here as *their father*, for were it not for the fact that he was the father of *all* of them and his mercies were aroused he would never have consented to Judah's proposal (*Midrash*).

אִם-כֵּן | אֲפואַ זֹאת עָשׂו — *If it must be so then do this.*

I.e., if such is the case and I cannot detain Benjamin any longer, then at least do the following to appease the lord of the land (*Radak*).

Jacob sought to appease the

1. Why was Judah's offer more acceptable to Jacob than that of Reuben which he had refused?

[In addition to the reasons recorded above and in the comm. to 42:37-38, there might be another possibility:

When Jacob said, 'Upon *me* has it all befallen' (42:36), he implied, as mentioned by the commentators, that only *he* as their father could realize the magnitude of the loss of two of his children; they as brothers could never appreciate his grief, and they could therefore never convince him to risk sending Benjamin.

Thus of all the brothers only Judah could step forward and convince Jacob otherwise. Judah, too, had been bereaved of two children (38:7, 10) and could appreciate his father's grief. Therefore, when he accepted responsibility for Benjamin's welfare, Jacob acquiesced.]

2. When Jacob said אֲפואַ, his conscience smote him and he exclaimed, 'I am now being punished for the grief I caused my father when I instead of Esau received his blessings.

When Esau came in after me, Father trembled and cried out מִי־אֲפואַ, *who — where — is the one ... ?* [27:33]. Providence is therefore causing me this grief now! (*Midrash; Yafeh Toar*).

[This *Midrash* is based on the fact that, as *Rashi* notes, the word אֲפואַ is essentially

Egyptian viceroy with tributes, much as he had tried to appease Esau before confronting him [32:14 ff] (*Akeidah*).

In this context, the word אֲפואַ is a redundant particle used for stylistic purposes. Idiomatically it means *therefore, then*. Contextually, the word is a composite of אִיה *where, and* פֹּה *here, and* the connotation of the full phrase is: אִם כֵּן, *if it must be so that I shall be forced to send him with you — then I must look around and seek אִיה, where, there is פֹּה, here, a plan and counsel to offer you. Accordingly, I say, Do this!* (*Rashi*).^[2]

[Thus the intent of the verse according to *Rashi's* latter interpretation is: If it must be so — 'where is there' a remedy? — by doing this, etc.]

[See comm. to מִי־אֲפואַ in 27:33 and *Sforno* there.]

מִזְמַרַת הָאָרֶץ — *Of the land's glory* (Hebrew: *Zimras*).

— *Onkelos* renders: *Of that*

we could have by now returned twice."

¹¹ *Israel their father said to them, "If it must be so then do this: take of the land's glory in your baggage and bring it down to the man as a tribute — a bit of balsam, a bit of honey, wax, lotus, pistachios and al-*

which is praised in the land — take every product that inspires people to sing (*m'zamrim*) its praises when it comes into being in the world (*Rashi*; *Midrash*).

— Products by which the land is praised (*Radak*).

ככליכם — *In your baggage* [lit. *utensils*].

והורירו לאיש מנחה — *And bring [it] down to the man as a tribute*.

See to it that he gets it before you actually have an audience with him. Then, by his response to the gift, you will be able to gauge his disposition toward you (*Sforno*).

מעט צרי ומעט רבש — *A bit of balsam* [and] *a bit of honey*.

The choice of gifts was wisely considered. A tribute directed to someone as barbarically materialistic as Esau, an outdoorsman, had to be eye-dazzling in quantity and in form of presentation; therefore Jacob had selected the large tribute enumerated in 32:15 ff. This occasion, however, called for a different kind of gift: it was being sent to the fabulously wealthy 'civilized' ruler of Egypt to whom money and cattle meant little. A gift to such a man must consist of quality not quantity. Jacob selected bits of *Eretz Yisrael's* rarest and choicest delicacies. Some of the items listed

here were mentioned above in 37:25 as items brought by Ishmaelite caravans to Egypt. Apparently, they were not readily available in Egypt (cf. *Sforno*; *Chizkuni*).

According to *Tur*, Jacob instructed them to take only a little of each so they should not show themselves off as being wealthy.

צרי, *balsam*, as noted in 37:25, refers to the fragrant resin [= balm] that exudes from the wood of the balsam tree.

When *Eretz Yisrael* is called a *land flowing with milk and honey* [*Exodus* 3:8], the *honey* refers to the honey exuded from sweet fruit, such as dates. See *Ramban* *ibid.* and *Rashi* to *Lev.* 2:11.

וט — *Wax* [and] *lotus*.

The translation of נבאח as *wax* [either beeswax or an aromatic gum] follows *Onkelos*, *Rashi*, and the *Midrash*. In the context of 37:25, above, *Rashi* interprets the word as a collective term for *spicery*, citing a cognate term in *II Kings* 20:13.

Rashi agrees that the word has both meanings. In the context of ch. 37, where it heads a detailed list of spices, *Rashi* interprets it as a collective term for *spicery*. Here, however, where it appears in the *middle* of the list, *Rashi* follows the context in rendering *wax* as do *Onkelos* and the *Midrash* (*Divrei David*).

On the translation of טל as *lotus* see comm. to 37:25. According to the *Midrash*, here it refers to firmly kneaded gum mastic — scarce in Egypt.

superfluous and the verse would be quite intelligible even were it omitted. Hence its inclusion is interpreted as evoking a memory of another occasion when the same unusual word was used. Accordingly, in the *Midrashic* sense, the verse means: If it is so then it is due to the time I aggravated my father, causing him to exclaim אֵיבָה. Nevertheless, do this.]

מקץ מג/יב"ד יב בָּטָנִים וְשִׁקְדִּים: וְכֶסֶף מִשְׁנֵה קָחוּ
בִידְכֶם וְאֶת־הַכֶּסֶף הַמוֹשָׁב בְּפִי
אֲמַתְחֲתִיכֶם תְּשִׁיבוּ בִידְכֶם אוֹלֵי מִשְׁנֵה
יג הוּא: וְאֶת־אֲחִיכֶם קָחוּ וְקוּמוּ שׁוּבוּ אֶל־
יד הָאִישׁ: וְאֵל שְׂרֵי יְתָן לָכֶם רַחֲמִים לִפְנֵי

בָּטָנִים וְשִׁקְדִּים — Pistachios and almonds.^[1]

— Kinds of nuts found in abundance today, but apparently scarce delicacies in ancient times (*Ralbag*).

According to the *Midrash*, the oil extract of these nuts is referred to. [See footnote].

The familiar translation of בָּטָנִים as pistachios is conjectural. *Rashi* comments: 'I do not know what they [בָּטָנִים] are, but in the dictionary of R' Machir [11th century grammarian, younger brother of R' Gershom Meor haGolah; who compiled a now-lost but oft-quoted Talmudic-French dictionary] I saw that it refers to pistachios. It seems to me that they are peaches.'

Onkelos renders it as בוטמין, which *Passhegen* maintains is synonymous with בּוּטָקָא, *Onkelos'* Aramaic rendering of אֵלֶּה, terebinth [*Pistacia terebinthus*] above in 25:4.

[I have been unable to find a basis for *Rashi's* suggestion — in the face of sources who interpret otherwise — that the term refers to peaches. Perhaps, he feels that pistachios were too insignificant a product to send to the Egyptian viceroy.]

The *Midrash* adds to the above items: wine and chilazon — the rare worm from which תְּכֵלֶת, purple dye, was made.

12. וְכֶסֶף מִשְׁנֵה קָחוּ בִידְכֶם — And take with you [lit. in your hands] double the money.

I.e., to buy food take twice as

much money as you had on your first trip; perhaps the price of grain has risen (*Rashi*).

... Or perhaps he wanted them to buy a double ration to spare themselves the difficulty of an early return to Egypt for more provisions (*R' Avraham ben HaRambam*).

The Hebrew phrase כֶּסֶף מִשְׁנֵה, literally means money twice. The translation as double the money, i.e. a larger amount of money for a more expensive purchase, follows *Rashi*, *Midrash*, *Targum* and most commentators. *Ramban* to 41:43 renders: The money for the second purchase. *Ibn Ezra* interprets: second monies, i.e. money with which to buy new grain — in addition to the returned monies from the first purchase.

The commentators on *Rashi* explain that the adjective מִשְׁנֵה occurs in Scripture either as the second, as above 41:43, or in the sense of double, as in *Exod.* 16:22: לֶחֶם מִשְׁנֵה, double loaf. In the former cases *Onkelos* renders תַּנְיָקָא, while in the latter he renders עַל תֵּר תִּרִין, as he does here.

— וְאֵת הַכֶּסֶף הַמוֹשָׁב ... תְּשִׁיבוּ בִידְכֶם — And the money that was returned ... return in your hands.

Return in your hands — literally. Do not leave it in your sacks, nor wait until you are asked for it, but carry it in your hands to demonstrate immediately on your return that you are honest men and intend to return any money not rightfully yours (*Alshich*).

— You must make an obvious point of returning with the money

1. Why did Jacob send nothing of the שִׁבְעָה מִיָּנִים, the seven kinds of produce, which really constitute the 'glory of the land'? — Simply because the famine was severe and nothing was growing. Jacob could send only products that keep a long time, and were left from previous seasons. That is why the *Midrash* takes 'pistachios and almonds' to refer to the oil of these nuts rather than the nuts themselves, which would long ago have been eaten (*R' Hirsch*).

monds ¹² And take with you double the money, and the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks return in your hands; perhaps it was an oversight. ¹³ Take your brother, too, and arise, return to the man. ¹⁴ And may El Shaddai grant you mercy

in your hand, since this will be a Kiddush HASHEM, a public sanctification of God's Name (R' Bachya; Alshich). [See Me'am Loez in footnote below].

According to most commentators, this was in addition to the double amount of money they were to take to buy grain.

According to Haamek Davar, however, since the returned money is not explicitly mentioned in v. 15 [see comm. there], the sense of כסף משנה, double the money in our verse is: money sufficient for a new purchase as well as for the return, the latter being included in the double amount. Accordingly, he postulates that the interpretation of our verse is: And take with you double the money [i.e. the money that was returned as well as money for a new purchase]; but the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks you should hold in your hands — open for all to see.

אוֹלֵי מִשְׁנֶה הוּא — Perhaps it was an oversight.

-- The Egyptian official might have forgotten it inadvertently (Rashi).

Because of the great confusion resulting from the many buyers thronging throughout Egypt, the following sales procedure was followed: Purchasers would put money in their sacks and give them to the official. He would weigh grain for them according to the amount of money he found in the sacks, and the purchasers would take their closed sacks (Ramban to 44:1; Radak).

Jacob reasoned that the officials may have put the payments on top

of the sacks to help them identify the owners of the sacks, and then, due to the confusion, forgotten to take the money when delivering the filled sacks to the customers (Rashbam; Radak).

13. וְאֶת־אֶחָיְכֶם קָחוּ — Take your brother too.

The verb take is in plural. Although it was only to Judah that he entrusted Benjamin, Jacob addressed all his sons, so they should feel a sense of collective responsibility (Sechel Tov).

14. 'Now, [that you have the money, the gift, and your brother Benjamin' (Midrash)] Jacob said, 'you lack nothing except prayer. And therefore I pray for you' (Rashi).

As the Sages declared [Sanhedrin 44b]: One should always offer up prayer before misfortune comes (R' Bachya).

וְיֵי שְׁנֵי — And may El Shaddai.

[The Divine Attributes designated by this Name were discussed in the comm. to 17:1.]

Rashi here explains: El Shaddai — God שְׁנֵי, Who is sufficient in granting His mercies, and in Whose hand is sufficient [נֵי] power to give, may He give you mercy, etc. This is the real meaning of the Name.^[1]

Further, Jacob said, 'My father blessed me with these words May El Shaddai bless you [28:2], and no mis-

1. Rashi proceeds to cite the Midrashic interpretation that the Name El Shaddai refers to Him as God Who said to the World [during Creation] נֵי, Enough! [For the heavens and earth, once

הָאִישׁ וְשָׁלַח לָכֶם אֶת-אֲחֵיכֶם אַחֵר
וְאֶת-בְּנֵימִין וְאֶנִּי בְּאִשֶּׁר שְׁכַלְתִּי

מִקֵּץ
מַגִּיד

hap befell me on the road. In the same way do I bless you: *May El Shaddai grant you mercy* (Midrash Or HaAfeilah cited in Torah Sheleimah 843).

— Since it is as *El Shaddai* that God revealed himself to my forefathers Abraham and Isaac [as well as to me (in 35:11)], I invoke that Name now when praying to Him on behalf of my sons (Midrash HaGadol).

יְתֵן לָכֶם רַחֲמִים לִפְנֵי הָאִישׁ — *Grant you mercy before the man* [Joseph].

— I.e., make him well-disposed and compassionate toward you (Abarbanel).

וְשָׁלַח לָכֶם — *That* [lit. and] *he may release* [lit. send] *to you*.

— The translation *release* in the sense of release from captivity follows *Onkelos*. Comp. *Exodus* 21:26 where the verb וְשָׁלַח, lit. *send* also has the connotation of *release*. It would be inappropriate to translate the verb here as *may he 'send' to you* since the brothers were going to him (Rashi).

אֶת אֲחֵיכֶם אַחֵר — *Your other brother*.

created, kept on expanding until God decreed 'Enough!' (see *Overview to Bereishis* p. 5).
— 'May He Who said to the world 'Enough!' now declare 'Enough' to my troubles. I have had no rest since my youth:

— Trouble through Laban; trouble through Esau; trouble of Rachel; trouble of Dinah; trouble of Joseph; trouble of Simeon; and trouble of Benjamin (Rashi).

— Whenever I finally sought tranquility, a new trouble always befell me (R' Bachya; see Rashi to 37:1).

Cf. *Tanchuma*: He Who will one day say to the righteous, 'Your sufferings are enough!' and to the wicked, 'Your ease has endured long enough!' may He grant you mercy before the man.

In the literal sense this refers to Simeon. Apparently, Simeon was in disfavor with Jacob because of the Shechem incident [see 34:25-30], and Jacob avoided even mentioning him by name. It is for this very reason that he left him in Egypt so long. Indeed, had his household not run out of provisions, Jacob would not yet have allowed Benjamin to go, but would have left Simeon in Egypt (Ramban).

Rashi [apparently drawn by the unusual Hebrew phraseology אֶת אֲחֵיכֶם אַחֵר which literally means: *your brother another*] cites a Midrashic interpretation that Jacob was enkindled with a prophetic inspiration: When he said אַחֵר, *other*, he implied that Joseph, as well as Simeon, would be redeemed.

Ramban approvingly mentions this interpretation and writes: 'This is correct. For at the moment of prayer Jacob directed his intentions to pray in a general manner for the other one [Joseph] as well, for perhaps he was still alive.'¹¹

וְאֶנִּי בְּאִשֶּׁר שְׁכַלְתִּי — *And as*

1. The Midrash perceives this prayer as connoting even a deeper, prophetic matter.

R' Yehoshua ben Levi expounded the verse as alluding to the Exiles:

May El Shaddai grant you mercy — corresponding to *He made all their captors kindly disposed toward them* [Psalms 106:46];

Before the 'man' alludes to the Holy One Blessed be He, Who is referred to as a 'man' of war [Exodus 15:3];

That he may release to you your brother — alluding to the Ten Tribes;

before the man that he may release to you your other brother as well as Benjamin. And as for me, as I have been bereaved, so I am bereaved."

for me, as I have been bereaved so I am bereaved.

— And as for me — [in contrast with you] — until you return, I will be in constant suspense, not knowing if I am to be even more bereaved than I already have been. As I consider myself bereft of Joseph and of Simeon, so I will now feel bereft of Benjamin [a feeling I will continue to have until you return safely] (Rashi).

Radak interprets: What can I do? If God decrees that a mishap befalls one of you, then the bereavement I suffered with Joseph will be repeated again.

Bereishis Zuta interprets this in the sense of utter resignation: Since I am already bereaved of my Joseph, I need not worry about further bereavement [i.e., no future bereavement can match that which I already endured by losing Joseph.] Compare Esther's cry [Esther 4:17] *בְּאֶשֶׁר אֶבְרָתִי אֶבְרָתִי*, What I have

lost, I have lost, i.e., my sacrifice has already been great; I have nothing more to lose.

Comp. *Ibn Ezra*: When I was bereaved of Joseph I felt that I was entirely bereft [i.e. of all of you (Ralbag).]

— 'You can no longer add to my bereavement, for I am already bereaved.' Jacob consoled himself in this way for every tribulation that came upon him, comparing everything to his bereavement of Joseph. Similarly, Esther's cry is to be interpreted: I am already lost [by being separated from my people (*Ibn Ezra* to *Esther* *ibid.*)], and if the king will slay me he will not add to my destruction' (Ramban).

According to R' Hirsch, Jacob meant, 'Unlike the journey you are about to begin, for which I pray that God will show you mercy, אָנִי, and I, meanwhile, will prepare myself for the ordeal I may have to face. If I am to be bereft of my

Your other brothers as well as Benjamin — referring symbolically to the exile of Judah and Benjamin;

And as for me — as I have been bereaved, by the First Destruction [brought about by the Babylonians], so I am bereaved by the Second Destruction [caused by the Romans]; but I will be bereaved no more.

[That is, following the Redemption from the 'Roman' (or: 'Edomite') exile (which according to Rabbinic tradition is still in force today) there will no longer be a destruction. This is derived from the phraseology of our passage which the *Midrash* perceives to mean: As I have been bereaved, I have been bereaved, i.e., I will suffer two destructions, but I will experience no more bereavement beyond those.]

In his commentary to the beginning of *Vayechi* (below 47:28), Ramban expounds upon this Midrashic interpretation that the descent into Egypt foreshadowed the Edomite Exile. Jacob prophetically perceived this symbolism, and therefore prayed in a general manner that applied to the future as well as to the immediate situation. [On the fundamental principle that every event that befell the Patriarchs foreshadowed the future destiny of their children, see Ramban to 12:6 (footnote, p. 436). On the Four Exiles, see *Overview* to *Lech Lecha* (p. 417).]

Ramban observes additionally that this passage has profound Kabbalistic implications. By invoking God as *El Shaddai* — a Name representing Him in His Divine Aspect of Strict Justice — and praying that He grant mercy, Jacob meant that God should raise Israel from the Divine attribute of Justice to that of Mercy. 'The student of Kabbalah will understand.'

מקץ טו שְׁכַלְתִּי: וַיִּקְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה
מַג/טו הָזֹאת וּמִשְׁנֵה־בָּסֶף לָקְחוּ בִידָם וְאֶת־
בְּנֵימֶן וַיָּקֻמוּ וַיֵּרְדּוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲמְדוּ לִפְנֵי
יֹסֵף: וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף אֶתָּם אֶת־בְּנֵימִין וַיֹּאמֶר

children as a result of your departure, I will be prepared for it.¹¹)

15. וַיִּקְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה הָזֹאת
— So [lit. and] the men took this tribute.

They are described as 'men' rather than 'brothers' to indicate that they embarked on their mission as 'men'; also, because they were in great fear and when they entered the gates of Egypt they did so not as brothers but disguised as ordinary men who 'coincidentally' came together (R' Bachya).

וּמִשְׁנֵה בָּסֶף לָקְחוּ בִידָם — And they took double money in their hand.

The 'money that was returned in the mouth of their sacks' [v. 12] which Jacob instructed them to take back is not mentioned here. Following Rashi and most commentators,

our verse discusses only the money they brought for their new purchases, as directed by Jacob. Of course, they also took the money they had found in their sacks! (Etz Yosef).

According to Haamek Davar, as noted, the failure to mention the returned money indicates that the latter was included in the term מִשְׁנֵה בָּסֶף, double amount of money.

וְאֶת בְּנֵימֶן — As well as Benjamin.

— I.e., and they took Benjamin as well. Although the verse uses the single verb לָקְחוּ, they took, for both the money and Benjamin, Onkelos uses two verbs: וַיִּקְחוּ for the money, and וַיֵּרְדּוּ for Benjamin. This is because Aramaic uses different verbs for objects and for people. When something inanimate is taken literally by the hand, the

1. Jacob's letter to the viceroy of Egypt.

Sefer HaYashar records that Jacob wrote a message to the viceroy of Egypt, and he gave it to his sons.

It read: "From your servant Jacob, son of Isaac the son of Abraham the Hebrew, prince of God, to the mighty and wise viceroy Tzafenas-Paane'ach, ruler of Egypt: Greetings of peace! May it be known to my lord, the ruler of Egypt, that the famine has become severe for us in Canaan, and therefore I sent my sons to you to buy some food for our sustenance. My children surround me — seventy people — and alas, I am very old, and cannot see with my eyes, for they are dimmed with age and with constant weeping for my son Joseph, who was taken from me. I charged my sons not to pass all together through the gates of the city when the came to Egypt, on account of the inhabitants of the land [so that they not be conspicuous to the people.] I also bade them go about the land of Egypt and seek my son Joseph: perhaps they would find him there.

"This they did, but as a result you considered them to be spies. Have we not heard of you as wise and understanding? How can you look upon their faces and declare them to be spies? We heard how you interpreted Pharaoh's dream, foretold the coming of the famine, and told him the truth; in your discernment, how can you fail to know whether or not my sons are spies?

"And now, my lord viceroy, I send you my son Benjamin, as you demanded of

15-16 ¹⁵ So the men took this tribute and they took double money in their hand, as well as Benjamin. They set out and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.

¹⁶ Joseph saw Benjamin with them. He said to the

Targum renders *take* by the verb וְנָסִיב [e.g. 34:25], while something which is 'taken' by persuasion [see also e.g. 2:15; 34:26] is rendered by the verb וְנִבֵּר [lit. *led*] (*Rashi*).

וְנִבֵּר לִפְנֵי יוֹסֵף — And [they] stood before Joseph.

— In the official area where he supervised sales of grain. At this point they had not yet exchanged any words with him, nor had they the opportunity of presenting their gift to him. Joseph had noticed them, but said nothing. Not knowing how to interpret his silence, they grew frightened, and stood in fear when they were brought to his house (*Chizkuni*; *Sforno*; *Akeidah*).

16. Joseph sees Benjamin and tests his brothers' sincerity

That Joseph was deeply moved by the sight of Benjamin is clear from the next several verses. Nevertheless, he still refrained from revealing his identity because he had vital questions that had to be answered. Had the brothers lost their jealousy of Rachel's children? How would they react when he showed favoritism to Benjamin? What would they do when he announced his intention to detain Benjamin — who 'stole' the goblet — as a slave? Had they kidnapped Benjamin from Jacob? (*Akeidah*; *R' Hirsch*)

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאִשֶּׁר עַל-בֵּיתוֹ — [And] he said to the one in charge [lit. upon] of his house.

— His son, Menasseh (*Midrash*; *Targum Yonasan*).

“my other sons. I only beg you, protect him until you send him back to me in peace with his brothers. Surely you know, or have heard, what our God did to Pharaoh when he took Sarah our mother to himself, or what He did to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, on her account; and what Abraham our father did to the four kings of Elam — how he defeated them all with his few men; and also what my two sons Simeon and Levi did to the city of Shechem, which they destroyed for the sake of their sister Dinah? What will they do for the sake of their brother Benjamin, who consoled them over Joseph, if they see a viceroy raise a strong hand against them on his account?

“Surely you know, O viceroy of Egypt, that our God's strength is with us, that He always listens to our prayers, and never forsakes us. As God lives, had I called upon God to rise up against you, when my sons told me how you treated them, you and your people all would have been destroyed before my son Benjamin ever appeared before you. But I reflected that Simeon my son was in your house and perhaps you were treating him kindly; therefore I did not act in this manner toward you. Now my son Benjamin comes to you with my other sons. Be careful and protect him, and God will stand guard for you over all your dominion.

“Now I have told you all that is in my heart. My sons come to you with their brother; rule the entire land well for their sake and send them all back to me in peace.”

מִקֵּץ
מַגִּיד
לְאֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּיתוֹ הָבֵא אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים
הַבֵּיתָה וְטָבַח טָבַח וְהָיָן כִּי אֶתִּי לֹאכְלוּ
יִי הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּצִהְרִים: וַיַּעַשׂ הָאִישׁ כְּאֲשֶׁר
אָמַר יוֹסֵף וַיָּבֵא הָאִישׁ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים
יִי בֵיתָה יוֹסֵף: וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים כִּי הוּבֵאוּ

Bring the men into the house. — הָבֵא אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים הַבֵּיתָה

I.e., into my private residence. Joseph was then standing at the palace gate or at the place where he judged the people (*Sforno*).

[And] have meat slaughtered, and prepare it. — וְטָבַח טָבַח וְהָיָן

According to the Sages in *Chullin* 91a, the expression טָבַח טָבַח implies Menasseh was to expose the slaughter-incision [so the brothers could see for themselves that the meat had been properly slaughtered according to Halachah. Although the Torah had not yet been given, Jacob's sons observed the commandments according to the tradition of their forefathers (*Rashi* there; see comm. to 26:5, p. 1083)]. The Sages continue that וְהָיָן, and prepare, means remove the גִּיד הַנֶּזֶף, displaced sinew, in their presence. This latter interpretation follows the view that the displaced sinew was forbidden to Noahides [i.e. to the sons of Jacob before the Torah was given. (See *Tosafos* there s.v. כִּמְאֵן; *Maharsha*; and comm. to 32:33).] See also *Targum Yonasan*.

Following another view in the Midrash, since the term וְהָיָן, prepare, is used in connection with the Sabbath [see *Exodus* 16:5], the Sages exegetically derived that the brothers had come to Joseph on a Friday and by וְהָיָן, prepare, Joseph ordered his steward to prepare for the Sabbath. This is regarded as a

Biblical allusion for the Rabbinic tradition that Joseph observed the Sabbath before it was ordained. (See also *R' Bachya*).

[The translation follows the syntax.] The phrase literally has an infinitive sense: וְלִטְבֹּחַ טָבַח וְלִהְיוֹת, and to slaughter something slaughterable and to prepare. Technically, were the word וְטָבַח to be a command, it would be vowelized וְטָבַח [just as the imperative form of שלח, send, is שְׁלַח (*Mizrachi*)] (*Rashi*).

Maharsha to *Chullin* 91a interprets *Rashi's* comment here— the וְטָבַח is not an imperative — in consonance with the Talmudic interpretation cited above: Joseph told his steward to allow the brothers to slaughter the animals themselves, since the Halacha forbids ritual slaughter by a heathen. The word וְהָיָן, prepare, however, is in the imperative, indicating that the steward himself should remove the forbidden nerve — but in their presence.

— כִּי אֶתִּי יֹאכְלוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּצִהְרִים For it is with me that these men will dine at noon.

I.e. the first meal of the day. *Onkelos* renders צִהְרִים [lit. noon] in this context as שִׁירוּתָא, an Aramaic term denoting the first meal [of the day]. This term often occurs in the Talmud in this sense; e.g. *Taanis* 11b; *Berachos* 39b. Wherever צִהְרִים means noon rather than a meal, *Onkelos* renders it טְהֵרָא (*Rashi*).

The idea is that *Onkelos* rendered the term צִהְרִים here by its contextual connotation of first [main] meal rather than by its literal interpretation of noon. That the Torah calls this meal 'noon' is because, as the Sages in *Shabbos* 10a observe, governmental officials do not eat a large meal early in the morning —

43
17-18

one in charge of his house, "Bring the men into the house; have meat slaughtered, and prepare it, for it is with me that these men will dine at noon." ¹⁷ The man did as Joseph said, and the man brought the men to Joseph's house. ¹⁸ But the men became frightened when they were brought to Joseph's house, and they

a time they reserve for judging the people — but at mid-day or early evening (see *Be'er Yitzchak*).

Joseph meant this as a test. He wished to observe how they behaved toward Benjamin during the meal, and whether they would display envy when Benjamin was given larger portions than the rest (*Sforno*).

Joseph had them dine at his table to lay the groundwork for the charge that they stole his goblet (*Ibn Caspi*).

17. וַיַּעַשׂ הָאִישׁ כְּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר יוֹסֵף — [And] the man did as Joseph said.

Da's Zekeinim cites the tradition that it is Menasseh, Joseph's son, who is referred to here as *man*. However, he wonders, Menasseh could not have been more than nine years old at the time [since Joseph was married at the beginning of the seven years of plenty and this was the second year of the famine (45:11; 47:18)]. It is difficult to reconcile this with *Rashi's* Midrashic interpretation [on 34:25] that the word *איש*, *man*, means someone over the age of thirteen. He leaves the matter unresolved.

Riva discusses this and citing *R' Yehudah HaChassid* compares it to the case of Er and Onan who, according to *Seder Olam* were but eight years old

when they sinned [see *Mizrachi* cited in 38:1], yet were subject to the Divine death penalty although it is axiomatic that Divine punishment is not inflicted on someone younger than twenty. *R' Yehudah* resolves the difficulty by maintaining that everything depends upon one's maturity, not necessarily his chronological age. In our case too, the reference to Menasseh as *man* was a reflection of his maturity, not his age.

וַיָּבֵא הָאִישׁ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים בֵּיתָהּ יוֹסֵף — And the man brought the men to Joseph's house.

I.e., he meant to bring them in, but did not succeed since they stopped him at the entrance [see verses 19 and 24]. This style is similar to 28:10 וַיֵּלֶךְ חֲרָנָה [lit. and he went to Charan] where the sense is that he headed for Charan, not that he actually arrived there as yet (*Or HaChaim* v. 24).

[Cf. *Rashi* to v. 24 where the Midrashic implication is that after he brought them inside they edged him back outside toward the doorway to talk with him.]

18. וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים כִּי הוּבְאוּ בֵּית יוֹסֵף — But [lit. and] the men became frightened when they were brought to Joseph's house.^[1]

1. The *Zohar* notes that the powerful brothers were terrified in the presence of the young steward who led them because they still felt guilt for having sold Joseph, and their courage failed them. Had it not been for this sin, they would not have feared at all.

The *Zohar* quotes Rabbi Yosi: "Woe to people who do not observe the Torah's commandments. Woe to them when God calls them for judgment and to account for their deeds. We know that Jacob's ten sons were very powerful, but when a young steward summoned them to Joseph's house they were terrified. How then must one feel when God summons him on the awesome Day of Judgment. Everyone should consider how he will answer before God his actions!"

בית יוסף ויאמרו על-דבר הכסף השב
באמתחתינו בתחלה אנחנו מובאים
להתגלל עלינו ולהתנפל עלינו ולקחת
אתנו לעבדים ואת-חמרינו: ויגשו אל-
האיש אשר על-בית יוסף וידברו אליו
כ פתח הבית: ויאמרו בי אדני ירד ירדנו

— And it was unusual for grain customers to lodge in Joseph's home; they usually stayed in the city's inns. Therefore the brothers assumed that this surprising visit was preliminary to imprisonment (*Rashi*).

Furthermore, they feared that in the relative seclusion and privacy of Joseph's home an act of injustice could be committed against them with impunity, whereas Joseph would be deterred from harming them publicly (*Akeidah*).

Rashi makes the linguistic observation that the word ויראו, spelled as it is with two י's [rather than וירא, with one י (from the root ראה) meaning *and they saw*], means *and they were afraid* (from the root ראה). *Onkelos* accordingly renders it by the Aramaic term for fear, ורחילו.

ויאמרו — *And they said.*

I.e., one to another (*Ralbag*).

אנחנו מובאים — *Are we being brought.*

I.e., inside this house (*Rashi*).

להתגלל עלינו — *So that a charge can be fabricated against us* [lit. *in order to roll itself on us*].

I.e., in order that an accusation regarding the money be 'rolled' [=devolved] upon us. *Onkelos*, taking גלל in the symbolic sense of *royal rank* — as he does in *Eccles. 12:6; Neh. 2:8* — renders: *to play the lord over us* (*Rashi*).

Onkelos apparently perceives the phrase as a metaphor: He will elevate himself above us as the Sea raises its waves [relating *hisgolel* to *gal*, the Hebrew word for wave]. Actually, the sense of the word is to *roll*, as one who turns from side to side against his fellow (*Ramban*).

— 'To turn himself against us', i.e. to oppress us (*R' Hirsch*).

וילהתנפל עלינו — [*And*] *that it crash down on us* [lit. *and to fall itself down upon us*].

I.e., and in order that this accusation of [having stolen] the money should fall upon us. *Onkelos*, who rendered this phrase by ולאסתקא ועלנא, *to seek a pretext against us*, did not translate it literally (*Rashi*).

R' Hirsch renders: To pounce down upon us.

ולקחת אתנו לעבדים ואת-חמרינו — *And that we be taken* [lit. *and to take us*] *as slaves along with our donkeys.*

I.e., because of his false pretext that we stole from him he will take us as slaves, while to redeem the loss of his money he will appropriate our donkeys (*Haamek Davar*).

❖ Why did they mention their donkeys?

In *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:40, *Rambam* discusses the compassion people have for their possessions. He notes that, 'People fear the loss of

43 said "Because of the money replaced in our sacks
19-20 originally are we being brought so that a charge can
 be fabricated against us, that it crash down on us, and
 that we be taken as slaves along with our donkeys."
¹⁹ They approached the man who was in charge of
 Joseph's house and spoke to him at the entrance of
 the house. ²⁰ And they said, "If you please, my lord:

their property as much as that of
 their own lives, some even more;
 but most people hold both in the
 same esteem.' He cites our passage
 as proof. [Cf. Abarbanel].

According to Ramban their concern
 for their donkeys was due to
 their apprehension of the consequences
 of their donkeys' loss: 'He will rob even our donkeys with our
 sacks; we will not be able to send
 grain home and our families will die
 of hunger!'

R' Bachya maintains that their
 animals were so important to them
 because one's animal is his sole
 means of survival in the desert.
 Comp. the murmurings of the
 Israelites against Moses in Exod.
 17:3: 'Why is it that you have
 brought us up out of Egypt to kill
 us, our children, and our livestock
 with thirst?'

19. וַיִּגְשׁוּ אֶל־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּית יוֹסֵף. [And] they approached the man
 who was in charge of [lit. upon]
 Joseph's house.

The implication of the verb וַיִּגְשׁוּ
 [approached] is pushed up, i.e.,
 'somewhat forcibly. Cf. the verb in
 19:9 (Sechel Tov; see Rashi below).

וַיִּדְבְּרוּ אֵלָיו פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת. And [they]
 spoke to him at the entrance of the
 house.

I.e., before they entered (Rash-
 bam), it being their intention that
 the members of the household not
 overhear them (Radak).

According to Rashi in v. 24,
 however, they had already entered
 [v. 17] but they gradually pushed
 him back towards the outside until
 they were talking with him at the
 doorway.

They wanted to discuss the mat-
 ter of the money and ascertain why
 they had been brought there (Or
 HaChaim).

Malbim suggests that by talking
 with the steward at the doorway,
 they wished to demonstrate that
 they did not want to enter until they
 had returned the money.

20. וַיֹּאמְרוּ — And they said.

— I.e., Judah spoke on their
 behalf. This accounts for they said
 being in plural, while my lord is in
 singular (Ibn Caspi; Sechel Tov).

בִּי אֲדֹנָי — If you please, my lord.

Rashi understands בִּי [bi] as an
 expression of petition (בְּעֵינָא) and
 supplication, related to the Aramaic
 term biya.

Ramban disagrees on several counts: a) the
 Hebrew בִּי cannot be cognate to the Aramaic
 בְּעֵינָא; b) as the Aramaic word biya is used in
 the Talmud and Midrash, it never connotes
 entreaty; to the contrary it connotes woe and
 distress. [He goes on to cite many such exam-
 ples. However, see Miztrachi who defends
 Rashi on every count.]

Ramban continues that Onkelos, who
 translated the phrase רַבּוֹנִי, please my
 lord, did not intend to suggest that bi is a
 derivative of b'va'u but merely rendered the
 phrase in accordance with the context, since
 bi always contextually connotes supplica-
 tion.

מקץ כא בַּתְּחִלָּה לְשֹׁכֵר-אֶבֶל: וַיְהִי כִּי-בָאנוּ אֶל-
מג/כא-כג הַמָּלוֹן וּנְפַתְחָה אֶת-אֲמַתְחֹתֵינוּ וְהָנָה
כסף-אִישׁ בְּפִי אֲמַתְחָתוֹ בְּסָפְנוּ בְּמִשְׁקָלוֹ
כב וַנֵּשֶׁב אֹתוֹ בְּיָדְנוּ: וּכְסָף אַחֵר הוֹרִדְנוּ
בְּיָדְנוּ לְשֹׁכֵר-אֶבֶל לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מִי-שֵׁם
כג בְּסָפְנוּ בְּאֲמַתְחֹתֵינוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלוֹם לָכֶם
אֶל-תִּירָאוּ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיכֶם נָתַן

... Similarly *Ramban* maintains that *Ibn Ezra's* interpretation is difficult. *Ibn Ezra* renders *בי*, *upon me*; it implies the elliptical declaration 'the iniquity is upon me; do with me as you wish, but hear me out.' [The basis for this is *Samuel* 25:24.] *Ramban* finds this difficult since we find the term *bi* used only in conjunction with *אדני*, *my lord* or *master*. According to *Ibn Ezra*, it should be used in other ways, such as '*bi*, my brother', or '*bi*, listen to me.'

Accordingly *Ramban* postulates that the expression is one of submission to a superior person: *בי אדני*, *over me, you are my lord* — the double pronoun *me* and *my* being used for emphasis.

We had indeed come down [lit. *come we came down*] originally [lit. *at the first*] to buy food.

[The verb is in the compound infinitive to lend emphasis.]

I.e., when we came down to Egypt at the very beginning of the famine to buy food we had sufficient funds for grain; we had no need to steal the purchase money (*Meshech Chochmah*).

Rashi follows the Midrashic interpretation based upon the dual emphasis of *come we came down*: "It was indeed a 'come-down' for us to descend here for grain; in our own country we supported others, and now we are dependent on your support!"

Although in the literal sense it would be quite proper to use the verb *go down* when speaking of the journey from the higher ter-

rain of Eretz Yisrael to Egypt [cf. 12:10], nevertheless *Rashi* pursues the Midrashic interpretation, this being a case of *היכא*, *whereas it is possible to expound we expound* [see *Mizrachi* to 12:1 (p. 425)] (*Sechel Tov*).

21. אֶל הַמָּלוֹן — At [lit. to] the inn.

— From where it was too distant for us to return with the money (*Akeidah*).

Or suggesting: There was no way we could return the money then without putting our lives in jeopardy, because the viceroy had warned us not to come to Egypt again without our younger brother (*HaKsav V' HaKabbalah*).

They modified the actual account for brevity, for in reality only Levi had opened his sack at the inn [42:27,35]; the rest of them did not discover their money until they reached their father's house (*Sechel Tov*).

HaKsav V' HaKabbalah maintains that the word *קלון*, *inn*, is used in many contexts for a permanent dwelling place (the Temple-site of the *Shechinah's* 'dwelling' is called *קלון*). Thus the brothers' account was accurate; they used a term referring to both the inn and their home.

— It was our own money in full [lit. by its weight].

— The coins were those we used to pay for our purchase; there wasn't even the slightest possibility

We had indeed come down originally to buy food. ²¹ But it happened, when we arrived at the inn, that behold! each one's money was in the mouth of his sack; it was our own money in full; so we have brought it back in our hand. ²² We have also brought other money down in our hand to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks."

²³ He replied, "All is peaceful with you; fear not. Your God and the God of your father must have put

that someone else's monies fell into our sacks by mistake (*Sforno*).

— It was clearly a plot to ensnare us; it could not be merely a coincidence (*Ralbag*).

וְנָשַׁב אֹתוֹ בְּיָדוֹ — So [lit. and] we have brought it back in our hand.

— With the obvious intention of returning it immediately (*Abarbanel*).

[See *Malbim* next verse.]

22. וְכֶסֶף אֲחֵר הוֹרְדָנוּ בְּיָדוֹ לִשְׂכֹּרֶה — אַכְל — *We have also brought other money down in our hand to buy food.*

This proves the honesty and sincerity of our intentions (*B'chor Shor*).

Do not think that we are confessing out of fear and that the money we are claiming to 'return' is really the money we brought to purchase grain. To the contrary! — we brought other money to buy food (*Malbim*).

לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מִיִּשֵׁם כֶּסֶפֵּנוּ בְּאִמְתַּחַתֵּינוּ — *We do not know who put our money in our sacks.*

The matter remains a mystery and a concern to us (*Alshich*).

[It is not clear why this phrase — which would appear to fit better contextually at the end of v. 21 — is placed here.]

23. The steward reassures them.

שְׁלוֹם לָכֶם אֵל־תִּירָאוּ — *All is peaceful with you* [lit. *peace is to you*], fear not.

— It was not to charge you with a crime that I brought you here, but merely as guests to dine with my master (*Abarbanel*; *Malbim*).

They were so obviously afraid [v. 18] that the steward felt compelled to offer this calming assurance (*Or HaChaim*).

וְאֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם — *Your God and the God of your father.*

— Your God: for He rewarded you in your own merit, but in the event your merit is not sufficient, then He rewarded you in your father's merit, as the God of your father (*Rashi*).

— Everyone knew that Jacob's family was accustomed to miracles (*Rashbam*).

וְנָתַן לָכֶם מִסְמוֹן בְּאִמְתַּחַתֵּיכֶם — *Must have put a treasure* [following *Onkelos*; lit. *something hidden* (*Ramban*)] in your sacks.

God caused it to be placed there. Rest assured that it was not a ploy to fabricate some charge against you (*Ralbag*).

— Perhaps someone hid a treasure in his granary and it was lost among the grain collected during the years of

מקץ
מג/כר-כו כד לָכֶם מַטְמוֹן בְּאִמְתַּחֲתֵיכֶם בְּסַפְּכֶם בָּא
אֵלַי וַיּוֹצֵא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־שְׁמֵעוֹן: וַיָּבֹא
הָאִישׁ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף וַיִּתֵּן־
מִים וַיִּרְחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיהֶם וַיִּתֵּן מִסְפּוֹא
לְחֻמְרֵיהֶם: וַיְכִינּוּ אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה עַד־בּוֹא
יוֹסֵף בְּצִהְרִים כִּי שָׁמְעוּ כִּי־שָׁם יֵאָכְלוּ
כו לֶחֶם: וַיָּבֹא יוֹסֵף הַבֵּיתָה וַיָּבִיאוּ לוֹ אֶת־
הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר־בְּיָדָם הַבֵּיתָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ־לוֹ

plenty. By some lucky chance it got into your sacks. It does not belong to the treasury — for I have received your payment (*Ibn Ezra*).

That is, someone must have left a hidden treasure in his sacks and despaired of its recovery and God caused you to have it. Now, Noachides who find a lost object are not commanded to seek its owner (*Or HaChaim*).

Ramban dismisses *Ibn Ezra's* interpretation of the Egyptian's explanation as mere words of consolation, that could not have been meant seriously — for how could it happen that each of the brothers 'happened' to receive *precisely* his own money?

He therefore postulates a more plausible explanation. In busy grain markets, the customers place their payment in empty sacks which they give to the attendant. Then the attendant empties the money from the sack, fills it with an equivalent value of grain, and has the donkeys loaded. In the case of the ten brothers, the marketplace was so hectic that day that their money was inadvertently left in the sack since the one who filled the order was in a great rush. Or perhaps the one who filled the sacks was not the one in charge of removing the money, and the two workers failed

to coordinate their tasks. Thus it happened that each found his own money still in his sack [see above v. 13; below 44:1].

According to *Ramban's* interpretation that money was left in the sacks, how could Joseph have said, 'Your payment reached me'? — Presumably, Joseph told them that since his ledgers showed that the brothers had paid in full, he had no claim against them. It could only be that God had wanted them to have the money (*R' David Feinstein*).

[In reply to *Ramban's* criticism, perhaps *Ibn Ezra* means to account for the Egyptian's insistence that the money was a gift from God. The very fact that it was virtually impossible for each to find his exact amount of money purely by coincidence was the best proof that *their God* had performed a miracle. *Ramban* may hold that even miracles should be seen to happen through a natural agency.]

לָכֶם מַטְמוֹן בְּאִמְתַּחֲתֵיכֶם בְּסַפְּכֶם בָּא אֵלַי וַיּוֹצֵא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־שְׁמֵעוֹן: — Your payment had reached me [lit. your money had come to me].¹

The money you found was a Divine blessing; *your money*, however, was duly received by me — have no fears about that! (*Radak*).

That your money found its way

1. As noted in the footnote to 41:57, the reason God caused Egypt to enjoy plenty while the rest of the lands suffered famine was in order to render possible the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved and then leave with great wealth [see 15:14]. At the time, Egypt was a poor country, and God orchestrated all of these events so that she would benefit from an influx of the gold and silver from other lands who were forced to

a treasure in your sacks. Your payment had reached me." And he brought Simeon out to them.

²⁴ Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house. He provided water and they washed their feet, and he gave feed to their donkeys. ²⁵ They prepared the tribute for when Joseph would come at noon, for they had heard that they were to dine there.

²⁶ When Joseph came home they brought the tribute that was in their hands to him into the house,

back into your sacks after I received it must have been the result of a miracle — it was certainly not placed in your sacks to implicate you in some sinister plot. I specifically recall and acknowledge that I received your payment; no one is accusing you of foul play (*Akeidah*).

וַיֹּצֵא אֶלֶּהֶם אֶת־שִׁמְעוֹן — And he brought Simeon out to them.

— To reassure them that they had nothing to fear (*Or HaChaim*), and to show that he no longer required a hostage (*B'chor Shor*).

וַיָּבֹא הָאִישׁ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים בֵּיתוֹ. יוֹסֵף — Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house.

Though v. 17 stated that he brought them to the house, it was only at this point — after he reassured them by saying [v. 23] *all is well with you* — that they followed him and actually entered the house. The whole previous conversation had, as noted, taken place at the entrance. Earlier, as noted above, they had been unwilling to remain there — they edged him towards the entrance where they conversed with him (*Rashi*).

וַיִּתֵּן מִקְסוּפָא לַחֲמֹרֵיהֶם — And he gave feed to their donkeys.

buy Egyptian grain. Thus, Egypt would amass fortunes that the Israelites would eventually take with them at the Exodus.

Though Joseph's steward did not realize it, his words contained a prophetic implication: 'your' money came to me: all the money that has come to me from everywhere is your money, i.e., it is ready for you to take (*Malbim*).

[On מִקְסוּפָא, *feed*, see 24:25.]

25. וַיִּכְנְנוּ אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה. — [And] they prepared the tribute.

— I.e., they arranged it beautifully, adorning it in fine vessels (*Midrash; Rashi*).

וַיָּבֹאוּ יוֹסֵף בְּצֹהָרִים — עֶרְבּוֹא יוֹסֵף — For [lit. until] Joseph would arrive at noon.

The 'full' spelling of בּוֹא, arrival [instead of the usual spelling בָּא] exegetically implies an extension [intimating that his arrival would be a 'full' one]: on this occasion he would arrive with his attendants (*Sechel Tov*).

כִּי שָׁמְעוּ בִּי־שֵׁם יֹאבְלוֹ לֶחֶם — For they had heard that they were to dine there [lit. that there they would eat bread].

They had heard — from the steward and from the members of the household who were preparing the meal. Bread is a general term for food (*Radak*).

26. וַיָּבֹא יוֹסֵף הַבֵּיתָה. — When [lit. and] Joseph came home [lit. to the house].

וַיָּבִיאוּ לוֹ אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדָם הַבֵּיתָה — [And] they brought the tribute that was in their hands to him into the house.

מקץ כו אָרְצָה: וַיִּשְׁאַל לָהֶם לְשָׁלוֹם וַיֹּאמֶר
מג/כז-כט הַשָּׁלוֹם אֲבִיכֶם הֲזָקָן אֲשֶׁר אִמְרַתֶּם
כה הָעוֹדְנָו חַי: וַיֹּאמְרוּ שָׁלוֹם לְעַבְדְּךָ
כט לְאֲבִינוֹ עוֹדְנָו חַי וַיִּקְרְוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ: וַיֹּשֶׁא
עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת-בְּנֵימִין אָחִיו בֶּן-אִמּוֹ

They were already inside the building — but the sense of *into the house* is that they were ushered from the ante-room where they had been waiting into his private inner chamber (*Rashi; Radak*).

Bereishis Rabbosi observes that they waited until he came into the house and did not go *outside* to meet him with the gift because outsiders might have suspected them of attempting to bribe him.

— *And they prostrated themselves to him toward the ground.*

This is the first time *all* Joseph's brothers — including Benjamin — bowed down to him. This is perceived by many commentators as the fulfillment of Joseph's first dream [37:7]. (See *Ramban* to 42:9).

27. וַיִּשְׁאַל לָהֶם לְשָׁלוֹם. — [And] he inquired after their welfare [lit. and he asked them about peace].

Etiquette dictates that one ask first after the welfare of those present, and only afterwards about those not present. Therefore, Joseph inquired first about them and then about Jacob (*Or HaChaim*).

1. According to the Midrash, Joseph asked about *two* people: *Is your father well?* referring to Jacob; the *old man of whom you spoke* referring to Isaac — *is he still alive?*

In their reply, however, they mentioned only that their *father* was well and alive, but they said nothing about Isaac who was already dead [he had died about ten years earlier], since they did not wish to be the bearers of evil tidings.

Hadar Zekeinim simplifies the chronology: Isaac was sixty years older than Jacob [25:26]. Thus, when Isaac died at 180 [35:28] Jacob was 120. As Jacob told Pharaoh shortly after this narrative [47:9], he was 130 years old at this time. Accordingly, thus, Isaac had died ten years earlier.

— *Is the welfare of your aged father of whom you spoke at peace?*

[That they had mentioned their aged father is evident from 44:20.]

This is more than a general question concerning their father's external relationships with his neighbors and surroundings. Were that Joseph's intention, he would have said *הַשָּׁלוֹם לְאֲבִיכֶם*, the usual idiomatic inquiry. Instead his question related to Jacob's *emotional* and *spiritual* well-being: Is he at peace with himself; free of worry and harassment? (*R' Hirsch*).

— *Does he still live?*

The sequence of Joseph's questions seems strange; first he asked about Jacob's health and *then* whether he was still alive. *R' Hirsch* comments that this order reveals Joseph's anxiety about his father. He asked after his father's welfare as would be expected — but then he had a frightening thought: perhaps my father has died in the interim! Quickly he adds, 'He is still alive, is he not?'

Other commentators resolve the sequence of the questions by suggesting that the second question

and they prostrated themselves to him toward the ground. ²⁷ He inquired after their welfare, and he said, "Is your aged father of whom you spoke at peace? Does he still live?"

²⁸ They replied, "Your servant our father is at peace; he still lives." And they bowed and prostrated themselves.

²⁹ Then he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, so he said, "Is this your

does not mean Is he still alive? but, is he still vigorous? Cf. this sense of the word in Josh. 5:8 and Rashi to Psalms 58:10. Thus, Joseph first inquired after Jacob's general welfare, then after the state of his health.

28. שְׁלוֹם לַעֲבָדְךָ לְאֲבִינוּ — Your servant our father is at peace [lit. peace is to your servant to our father].⁽¹⁾

[In continuation of R' Hirsch's comment to the previous verse] "...They could answer only שְׁלוֹם לַעֲבָדְךָ [intimating that he was at peace only externally, but not, as Joseph had asked, that he was שְׁלוֹם, internally at peace, since he was fearful about Joseph, Simeon and Benjamin.]

וַיִּקְרֹוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ — And they bowed and prostrated themselves.

— In gratitude for his concern about their welfare (Rashi).

— At the mention of their father (Radak).

According to Alshich, it was not in deference to Joseph that they bowed, but in gratitude to HASHEM for the warm reception they had received.

The verb קָרַר denotes bowing the

head [קָרַר], and הִשְׁתַּחֲוָה denotes prostration upon the ground (Rashi).

Radbag renders similarly: First they bowed their heads in deference to him as demanded by etiquette, and then they paid him further obeisance by prostrating themselves. See Radak Shorashim s.v. קָרַר, and cf. Ibn Ezra to 23:8 above.

Rashi's interpretation follows the Sages in Berachos 34b; Shevuos 16b; Megillah 22b (see Maharsha there) that "קִירָה" means falling on the face; כְּרִיעָה means going down upon the knees, and הִשְׁתַּחֲוָה is spreading out of the hands and feet.

Rashi in Sukkah 53a explains in more detail that *kidah* as mentioned in Scripture consists of bending only the face down to the ground. The Talmud notes there that no one in the Temple could perform this feat except R' Shimon ben Gamliel. When Levi attempted a *kidah* in the presence of R' [Yehudah HaNassi], he became lame [due to the tremendous strain which dislocated his thigh].

29. וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו — Then he lifted up his eyes.

In the sense that he focused his gaze on the members of the group before him (Radak).

וַיִּרְא אֶת בְּנֵימִין אֶחָיו — And [he] saw [i.e., singled out] (Radbag) his brother Benjamin, his mother's son.

That he had already seen Benjamin is mentioned in v. 16.

1. Joseph is criticized by the Sages in Sotah 13b for having remained silent when his brothers referred to his father as your servant and not protesting this slight to his father's honor. [Cf. 50:25].

According to R' Yishmael in Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, in punishment for each of the ten times

מִקֵּץ מַגֵּל-לֵא 5 וַיֹּאמֶר הִזֶּה אֲחִיכֶם הֶקְטַן אֲשֶׁר אִמְרָתֶם
 אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יַחֲנֶךָ בְּנִי: וַיֹּמַהֲרָ
 יוֹסֵף כִּי-נִכְמְרוּ רַחֲמָיו אֶל-אָחִיו וַיִּבְקֹשׁ
 לִבְכוֹת וַיָּבֹא הַחֲדָרָה וַיִּבְךְ שָׁמָּה: וַיִּרְחֹץ 6

The intent is that his eyes now singled out Benjamin, and he saw him as *his brother, his mother's son*. Benjamin's features resembled Rachel's and in him Joseph saw his mother who died when he was but an eight year old child. Furthermore, this passage prepares us for his desire to weep (*Zohar; Ashtruc; Haamek Davar*).

הִזֶּה אֲחִיכֶם הֶקְטַן אֲשֶׁר אִמְרָתֶם אֵלַי —
Is this your 'little' brother of whom you spoke to me?

The question directed about the thirty-one year old Benjamin was both humorous and sarcastic: Is this the one you call 'little,' the one you were afraid to bring here on account of his tender years? Is this the 'young child' from whom we are to learn the truth? He is a grown man! (*Abarbanel; Haamek Davar*).

וַיֹּאמֶר — *And he [Joseph] said.*
 [I.e., turning to Benjamin and addressing him directly] ...

אֱלֹהִים יַחֲנֶךָ בְּנִי — *God be gracious to you, my son.*

Since you are the survivor of your mother, may God grant you

grace that your brothers and others will befriend you (*Sforzo*).

By adding the words *my son* Joseph was also emphasizing his pretended surprise and sarcasm over seeing this grown man — himself the father of ten children — who had been presented to him as their 'little' brother (*Ashtruc*).

According to the *Midrash*, Joseph's choice of blessing him with an expression of חַן, *grace*, is significant:

The other brothers had already been blessed with God's *grace*, as we find Jacob referring to his children as 'the children whom God has graciously given [חַנּוּן] your servant.' [33:5]. Benjamin had not yet been born [and was therefore not included among the children mentioned in that blessing] — therefore, Joseph now blessed him with God's *grace* (*Rashi*).

In *Bereishis Zuta* this benediction is credited with benefitting Benjamin's descendants: 'Were it not for this prayer, the tribe of Benjamin would have been left without a survivor in the incident of the Con-

Joseph silently listened to the epithets *servant* used of his father [five times directly from the brothers and five times as repeated by the translator who stood between them (*Radak* ad. loc.)], a year was deducted from his life-span [which traditionally should have been the usual 120 years for the righteous]; he died at the age of 110 [50:26].

This punishment was consistent with the Commandment [Exodus 20:12], *Honor your father and your mother that your days may be prolonged*, where *Rashi* explains, '... but if you do not honor them your days will be shortened.'

In this connection, *R' Yehudah HaChassid* notes that even Jacob's being called 'servants' was not without Providential significance. According to one opinion, Jacob was called 'servant' five times in retribution for the five times he had described himself as a servant of his brother Esau [32:5; cf. footnote to 25:23 (p. 1057)]. Another opinion maintains, to the contrary, that Jacob's humility in his confrontation with Esau entitled him to be described five times in Scripture as the 'servant' of God. [Cf. *Eruvin* 13b.]

43 'little' brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he
30-31 said, "God be gracious to you, my son."

³⁰ Then Joseph rushed because his compassion for his brother had been stirred and he wanted to weep. So he went into the room and wept there. ³¹ He

cubine of Gibeah; cf. Judges 21:22 חוננו אתם, we have acted graciously with them.

30. נִמְהָר יוֹסֵף — Then [lit. and] Joseph rushed.

I.e. he hastily completed his business in order to get to his room for he was overcome with emotion and wanted to weep (Sifsei Kohen).

כִּי נִבְמְרוּ רַחֲמָיו אֶל-אֶחָיו — Because his compassion for his brother had been stirred.

— [Lit. his compassion became enkindled toward Benjamin.] The verb כָּמַר means enkindled; heated. In Mishnaic Hebrew [Bava Metz'ia 74a] we find the term זֵיתִים כּוֹמֵר, a heated mass of olives; in Aramaic [Pesachim 58a]: מְכַמֵּר, drying up; in Scripture [Lam. 5:10]: עוֹרֵנוּ כְּתֵנוֹר, Our skin was scorched like an oven (Rashi).^[1]

וַיִּבְקֵשׁ לִבְכוֹת — And he wanted to weep.

Joseph became so emotional

because he could still not reveal his true identity to Benjamin, and because he knew that he would still be inflicting further suffering on him in the matter of the goblet [chapt. 44] (Haamek Davar).

וַיֵּבֶא הַחֲדָרָה וַיִּבְכֶּה שָׁמָּה — So [lit. and] he went into the room and wept there.

The room, i.e., his private inner chamber, which only he was allowed to enter (Haamek Davar).

— There he could weep without being overheard (Midrashei HaTorah).

And wept — at the grief of his father and brothers (Sforno).

According to Midrash HaChafetz [Torah Sheleimah 882], Joseph wept also for his grandfather Isaac, for he learned from the brothers that the Patriarch had died [see comm. to v. 28] and he, Joseph, had not been able to pay him final honor.

From the fact that his weeping enabled Joseph to regain his com-

1. Rashi cites the Midrashic account of the dialogue that brought Joseph to tears.

Joseph asked Benjamin 'Have you a maternal brother?'

'I had a brother,' Benjamin replied, 'but I do not know where he is.'

'Do you have sons?'

'I have ten.'

'What are their names?'

'Bela, and Becher,' etc. [see 46:21].

'What is the significance of these names?'

Benjamin replied, 'They all have some reference to my brother and the troubles that have befallen him: Bela — because he was swallowed up (nivla) among alien nations; Becher — because he was the first born (bechor) of his mother; Ashbel — because God sent him into captivity (sh'va'o El); Gera — because he became an alien (ger) in a strange land; Na'aman — because he was very pleasant (na'im); Achi and Rosh — because he was my brother (achi) and my superior (rosh); Muppim — because he learned from the mouth (mepi) of my father; Chuppim — because he did not witness my marriage canopy (chuppah) nor I his; and Ard — because he went down (yarad) among the nations [see Sotah 36b].

When Joseph heard this his feelings became stirred up for his brother.

מִקֵּץ מַג/לִב־לֵג לֵב
פָּנָיו וַיֵּצֵא וַיִּתְאַפֵּק וַיֹּאמֶר שִׁימוּ לָחֶם:
וַיִּשְׂימוּ לוֹ לִבְדּוֹ וְלָהֶם לִבְדָּם וְלַמִּצְרִים
הָאֲכָלִים אֹתוֹ לִבְדָּם כִּי לֹא יוֹכְלוּן
הַמִּצְרִים לֶאֱכֹל אֶת־הָעֵבְרִים לָחֶם כִּי־
לֹא תוֹעֵבָה הוּא לַמִּצְרִים: וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לִפְנֵיו
הַבָּכָר כְּבִכְרָתוֹ וְהַצֵּעִיר כַּצֵּעֲרָתוֹ

posture, *Sechel Tov* observes that 'tears extinguish the coals of the heart.'

31. The meal with Joseph.

וַיִּרְחֹץ פָּנָיו — [And] he washed his face.

— To wash away his tears and conceal the fact that he had been crying (*Sechel Tov*).

The first time Joseph cried [above 42:24] the verse does not mention that he washed his face. Perhaps then he was not planning to spend much time with them and did not fear that they could tell he had been crying, while now he was to remain in their intimate company for an entire meal, and he wanted to avoid detection (*Chizkuni*).

וַיִּתְאַפֵּק וַיֹּאמֶר שִׁימוּ לָחֶם — [And he] fortified [lit. strengthened] himself and [he] said, 'Serve [lit. place] food [lit. bread]!'

He fortified himself — i.e., he controlled his emotions (*Sechel Tov*).

The rendering *fortified* in the sense of *made a strong effort* [to contain himself] follows *Rashi* who cites the meaning of *strong* in the verb אָפַק in *Job* 12:21 and *ibid.* 41:7.

וַיִּשְׂימוּ לוֹ לִבְדּוֹ וְלָהֶם לִבְדָּם — [And] they served [lit. placed] him [Joseph] separately, and them [= the brothers] separately, and the Egyptians who ate with him by separately.

They served Joseph by himself — in deference to his royal rank (*B'chor Shor; Radak*); furthermore, since Egyptians and Hebrews did not, as noted further in this verse, dine together, Joseph did not dine with his brothers, nor did he and his brothers dine together with the Egyptians (*Sforno*). From the fact that Joseph did not dine with the Egyptians, *R' Hirsch* infers that he did not disown his Jewish heritage, even after so many years in Egypt.

Haamek Davar emphasizes that Joseph's practice of dining privately was not because he was a Hebrew and the Egyptians refused to eat with him. To the contrary, the Egyptians accorded him the highest honors and were in awe of his royal position. They would certainly not have shunned him. Rather he ate alone because it was not proper for someone of his royal status to sit with servants. The statement that *the Egyptians could not bear to eat with the Hebrews* is meant to explain why the Egyptians would not eat with the brothers.

Furthermore, had Joseph dined with his brothers — a practice the Egyptians found abhorrent — brothers might have suspected that he was not an Egyptian. He did not dine with the Egyptians out of respect to his brothers, and the Egyptians did not dine with the brothers because of the reason given by the verse. Thus, each group dined separately (*Ibn Caspi*).

כִּי לֹא יוֹכְלוּן הַמִּצְרִים לֶאֱכֹל אֶת הָעֵבְרִים לָחֶם — For the Egyptians could not

43 washed his face and went out, fortified himself and
32-33 said, "Serve food." ³² They served him separately and them separately and the Egyptians who ate with him separately, for the Egyptians could not bear to eat food with the Hebrews it being loathsome to Egypt. ³³ They were seated before him, the firstborn according to his seniority and the youngest according

bear to eat food [lit. bread, a general term for food] with the Hebrews.

The term עֶבְרִים, *Hebrews*, was used for no other group but the descendants of Abraham. It is remarkable, therefore, that even then, when the family consisted of less than seventy people, they were prominent enough to have a special national name. Even earlier [40:15], in describing his background to the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers, Joseph could call the land of Canaan אֶרֶץ הָעִבְרִיִּים, *land of the Hebrews* (R' Hirsch).

Most commentators agree, however, that the Egyptians despised all foreigners, avoiding social intercourse with members of any national group that ate foods the Egyptians abhorred. That our verse specifies 'Hebrews' is simply because the brothers happened to be Hebrews.

Rashbam accordingly interprets that *Iurim* in this context refers to all foreigners from עֵבֶר הַנָּהָר, *the other side of the river*, whom the Egyptians, as a haughty and arrogant people, held in contempt [see Isaiah 30:7].

לְיִשְׁבּוֹ לִפְנֵי הַדָּבָר בְּבִכְרוֹתוֹ — *It being loathsome to Egypt:*

I.e., it was a hateful thing to the Egyptians to eat together with the Hebrews [and other foreigners]. Onkelos states the reason for this (Rashi). [Comp. Rashi, Exodus 8:22].

The reason offered by Onkelos and Targum Yonasan is that 'the Hebrews would eat flesh of the sheep which the Egyptians worshipped.' Comp. 46:34: *For every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians*; furthermore in Exod. 8:22 it is written: *We shall sacrifice what is loathsome in Egypt to HASHEM our God.*

That they ate meat at this meal is evident from Joseph's instructions to his steward that an animal be slaughtered and prepared [v. 16]. Some are of the opinion that the Egyptians worshipped the constellation טֶלֶה, *lamb* [Aries] and therefore refrained from eating meat. Whatever sheep the Egyptians raised were for milk and wool (Radak). [see Mizrachi, cited in 37:36 s.v. שֶׁר הַטֶּבְחִים, however, who suggests that the Egyptians refrained only from eating sheep but did eat beef and flesh of other animals.]

Tzror HaMor observes that Joseph's eating and serving sheep to his guests was eloquent testimony to his repudiation of this form of idolatry.

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לִפְנֵי הַדָּבָר בְּבִכְרוֹתוֹ וְהַיָּעִיר כַּעֲרֵחוֹ — *And they were seated [lit. they sat] before him — the firstborn according to his seniority, and the young[est] according to his youth.*

The translation *were seated* follows Rashi's Midrashic interpreta-

מקץ מג/לד
 וַיִּתְמְהוּ הָאָנָשִׁים אִישׁ אֶל-רֵעֵהוּ: וַיֵּשֶׁא
 מִשָּׂאת מֵאֵת פָּנָיו אֱלֹהִים וַתֵּרֶב מִשָּׂאת
 בְּנִימָן מִמִּשָּׂאת כָּלֶם חֲמֵשׁ יָדוֹת וַיֵּשֶׁתּוּ
 א מד/א
 וַיִּשְׁכְּרוּ עִמּוֹ: וַיֵּצֵו אֶת-אֲשֶׁר עַל-בֵּיתוֹ

tion according to which *they sat* means that they did so *in compliance with Joseph's instructions*:

'He tapped the goblet [as though divining] and called out: "Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zevulun, sons of one mother, be seated in that order," and similarly with the others. When he came to Benjamin he said, "He has no mother, and neither do I — let him sit beside me" [i.e. at the next table, nearest in position to Joseph; from *Tanchuma*].

[Apparently, the Midrash pre-supposes that Joseph thought that Jacob's other wives were still alive. Actually, all his wives (except according to some views, Bilhah) had died by this time; see *Seder Olam* #2 (*Chizkuni*).]

By making this public display of divining with the goblet, Joseph was preparing them for the test that followed (*Ibn Caspi*). *Rashbam* interprets similarly; see below.

According to *Chizkuni's* own interpretation of the passage, the literal sense of the phraseology וַיֵּשְׁבוּ *and they sat*, indicates that they sat down in the order of their seniority of *their own accord* as they usually did on such occasions.

Some find Scriptural support for the Rabbinic interpretation that the seating arrangement was dictated by Joseph. The expression וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לִפְנֵי, [literally *and they sat before him*] implies strongly that they took their seats by his command and in

accordance with his will. This stands to reason since one does not simply seat himself before a high official without being instructed to do so. Comp. 10:9: like Nimrod a mighty hunter *before HASHEM*, where the connotation of לִפְנֵי ה' could similarly be: by *HASHEM's* grace. Cf. also 27:7 where *Rashi* explicitly explains and 'I will bless you *before HASHEM*' to mean by His permission; with His approval.

According to *Yafeh Toar*, the seating order is as *Rashi* comments: the brothers were separated according to their mothers, and within each group they were seated chronologically.

The implication of *Onkelos* and *Bereishis Rabbah*, however, is that they were seated chronologically without regard to their mothers.

וַיִּתְמְהוּ הָאָנָשִׁים אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ — *The men looked at one another in astonishment* [lit. *and the men were astonished man to his comrade*].

Following *Rashi's* Midrashic interpretation:

— They were astonished at the knowledge displayed by Joseph's seating instructions in which he knew the order of their birth. They had all been born in the span of seven years so he could not have guessed their ages merely from their appearance (*Akeidah*; *Rashbam*).

According to *Chizkuni* [following *Daas Zekeinim*], their astonishment does not refer to the seating, but to Joseph's decision to dine

to his youth. The men looked at one another in astonishment.

³⁴ He had portions that had been set before him served to them, and Benjamin's portion was five times as much as the portion of any of them. They drank and became intoxicated with him.

separately — neither with the Egyptians nor with them, thus confusing them as to his real identity.

Minchah Belulah maintains that the passage refers to the Egyptians who were astonished at the unprecedented special treatment Joseph accorded the brothers.

Torah Sheleimah cites *Midrash Ha-Biur* that the brothers were astonished and fearful lest Joseph's goblet reveal to him that they had sold Joseph.

34. וַיֵּשֶׂא מִשָּׂאָה מֵאֵת פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים — [And] he had portions that had been set before him served to them [lit. and he (i.e. the steward in charge [Radak]) carried the portions from his (Joseph's) face to them].

It was customary for monarchs and dignitaries during meals to send selections of their own portions to certain special guests as a mark of honor (*R' Avraham ben HaRambam*).

The term *מִשָּׂאָה* refers to portions of food (*Rashi*; following *Midrash* and *Pesachim* 36b).

According to *Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* the term *מִשָּׂאָה* refers not to portions of food, but to gifts, which Joseph gave them during the meal. The expression *מֵאֵת פְּנֵי*, lit. *from his face*, means that were first brought before him for his personal inspection and prior approval.

וַתֵּרֶכֶּב מִשָּׂאָה בְּנֵימִין מִמִּשְׁאֵת בְּלֵם חֶמֶשׁ זֵדוֹת — [And] Benjamin's portion was five times as much as the portion of any of them [lit. but Benjamin's portion was increased from

the portions of all of them five 'hands.'].]

Joseph gave Benjamin a portion five times as large as that of the other individuals; it was not five times as much as the sum total of all the portions (*R' Avraham ben HaRambam*).

Rashi follows the *Midrash*: In addition to the regular portion presented to Benjamin, Joseph gave him additional [four] portions, from himself, his wife, and his two sons.

The brothers surmised that Joseph was befriending them in this way in order to assuage his conscience over the maltreatment to which he had subjected them. They also assumed that Joseph was giving Benjamin favorable treatment to compensate for having torn him away from his aged father because of suspicions that were proven baseless (*Radak*).

According to most commentators, however, [e.g. *Ramban*; *Akeidah*; *Bchor Shor*; *Sforno*] Joseph's behavior toward them was a test to see whether they would be jealous of Benjamin. This theme will be discussed in more detail below.

וַיִּשְׁכְּרוּ וַיִּשְׁכְּרוּ עִמּוֹ — [And] they drank and became intoxicated with him.

[The Torah informs us of this because it was an unusual event]: From the day Joseph was sold until that moment neither the brothers

מקץ
מד/ב-ג
לֹא־מָלֵא אֶת־אֲמֹתָחַת הָאָנָשִׁים אֶכְלָ
בְּאֶשֶׁר יוֹכְלוֹן שָׁאת וְשִׁים בְּסָף־אִישׁ בְּפִי
אֲמֹתָחַתוֹ: וְאֶת־גְּבִיעִי גְבִיעַ הַכֶּסֶף תִּשִּׂים
בְּפִי אֲמֹתָחַת הַקֶּטָן וְאֶת כֶּסֶף שִׁבְרוֹ
נִיעַשׁ כְּדָבָר יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר: הַבֶּקֶר אֹר

nor he had drunk wine (*Rashi* from Midrash).^[1]

This exegesis is alluded to in the qualifying word *עִמּוֹ*, with him — i.e., it was only with him that they now drank; without him they had not. Similarly, that Joseph had refrained from drinking all these years is alluded to by the reference to him in 49:26 as the 'Nazarite of his brothers' (*Shabbos* 139a).

Chizkuni explains why the brothers, who observed the laws of the Torah before it was given, were permitted to drink the wine of non-Jews. The prohibition against such wine falls under two categories: *יֵין נֶסֶךְ*, wine used for idolatry, and *סֵתֶם יֵינָם*, their ordinary wine. The first category is forbidden by the Torah, and the brothers would have avoided drinking it. The second category, ordinary wine, was prohibited only by the Sages. Since it was a Rab-

binic enactment, the brothers were not required to observe it, just as no Jews were required to do so prior to this enactment.

The term *נִשְׁכָּרוּ* [and they became intoxicated] implies that they drank to excess, not being accustomed to drink with royalty (*Sforno*).

According to *R' Shmuel ben Chafni*, the term does not necessarily imply intoxication but drinking in excess of one's personal capacity to a point of becoming lightheaded and merry.

Tur maintains that Joseph's true intention in trying to intoxicate them was so that when they left they would not think of looking in their sacks and thereby discover the goblet he planned to hide there.

XLIV

1. The final test. Benjamin is accused of thievery.

The brothers' attitude toward the privileged treatment afforded Benjamin convinced Joseph that they were no

longer spiteful, but not all his doubts had been resolved. Would they be ready to fight and sacrifice for the sake of a child of Rachel? If so, he could pardon them (*R' Munk*).^[2]

1. The obvious questions arise: That Joseph drank is understandable since he was finally reunited with his brothers. However, the brothers did not recognize him; why did they drink after so many years of mournful abstinence? It is not sufficient to suggest that they did so out of respect for the Egyptian's royal position; some excuse could have been offered.

More probably, the brothers were puzzled by Joseph's vacillating behavior toward them. "Only yesterday he condemned us as spies," they reasoned, "and now he drinks with us! Perhaps he still thinks we are spies and he is trying to intoxicate us to find out our secrets and establish our veracity. As people say, 'when wine enters secrets leave.' If we refuse to drink with him he will definitely accuse us of having something sinister to hide. No, we will drink and become intoxicated and thereby prove we are innocent." So, they drank and became intoxicated with him (*Tzeidah LaDerech; Gur Aryeh*).

2. Or *HaChaim* offers three reasons for Joseph's subjecting them to this tribulation:

- a) By exposing them to shame for thievery, he intended this charge of stealing to atone for their sin of having stolen [i.e. kidnapped and sold] him;
- b) to test their love for Benjamin and provide atonement for their hatred of himself;
- c) to give them the apprehension that just as he knew other intimate things about them — ostensibly by divination — perhaps he was aware of their crime against him.

¹ Then he instructed the one in charge of his house saying, "Fill the men's sacks with as much food as they can carry and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack. ² And my goblet — my silver goblet — place in the mouth of the youngest one's sack along with the money of his purchase." And he followed Joseph's word exactly.

As Ramban explains in 42:9, it was not Joseph's intention merely to cause them further anguish. He was afraid that they were as jealous of Benjamin — Jacob's favorite — as they had been of him. Possibly, there was strife between them and Benjamin because Benjamin knew or sensed that they had done away with Joseph. If such was the case, it would be dangerous to let Benjamin travel with them. To test them, he arranged for Benjamin to be charged with theft and arrested.

וַיֹּצֵא אֶת־אִשֶּׁר עַל־בֵּיתוֹ — Then [lit. and] he [Joseph] instructed the one in charge of his house.

— His son, Menasseh (Midrash; see 43:16, 17).

מָלֵא אֶת־אֲמָתוֹתָם הָאֵנָשִׁים אֵכֶל כַּאֲשֶׁר יוּכְלוּן שָׂאת — Fill the men's sacks with as much food as they can carry.

— More than their money's worth (Ramban).

Joseph's extravagant heaping up of food and the return of their money was intended to point up by contrast their apparent baseness in 'repaying with evil' by stealing the goblet (Alshich).

וַיִּשֶׂם כֶּסֶף־אִישׁ בְּפִי אֲמָתוֹתָיו — And put each man's money in the mouth of his sack.

This placing of each man's money in his sack was to be done with the brothers' knowledge, os-

tensibly in reparation for Joseph's earlier harsh treatment. As noted, the official who filled the grain sacks would close and seal them, therefore the brothers did not open their sacks and discover the silver goblet that had been slipped into Benjamin's sack (Ramban).

According to Abarbanel, the steward was to return all their money — even what they returned from the first visit.

וְאֶת־גְּבִיעִי זָבִיעַ הַכֶּסֶף — And my goblet — my silver goblet.

— He stipulated the silver one, since he had others (Ralbag).

— The reference was to the silver royal goblet [see v. 5] (Tz'ror Ha-Mor).

In Egypt silver was scarcer, and hence more valuable, than gold (Paaneach Raza).

וַיִּשֶׂם בְּפִי אֲמָתוֹתָם הַקָּטָן וְאֶת כֶּסֶף שָׂכְרוֹ — Place in the mouth of the youngest [lit. little] one's pouch along with the money of his purchase.

I.e., 'when you put his money in his bags, slip in the silver goblet at the same time.' Benjamin is referred to as הקָטָן, the 'little' one, as a term of endearment (Sechel Tov).

וַיַּעַשׂ כְּדִבְרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר — And he followed Joseph's word exactly [lit. and he did as Joseph's word that he had spoken.]

מקץ מדר-ה
וְהָאֲנָשִׁים שָׁלְחוּ הֵמָּה וְחֲמִרֵיהֶם: הֵם
וַיָּצְאוּ אֶת־הָעִיר לֹא הִרְחִיקוּ וַיּוֹסֶף אָמַר
לְאִשֶּׁר עַל־בֵּיתוֹ קוּם רִדֵּף אַחֲרֵי
הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהִשְׁגָּתָם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם לָמָּה
הִשְׁלַמְתֶּם רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה: הֲלוֹא זֶה
אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁתָּה אֲדֹנִי בֹו וְהוּא נִחַשׁ נִחַשׁ בֹּו

3. הַבֶּקֶר אֹר — *The day* [lit. morning] dawned [lit. was light].

I.e., as soon as day dawned. On one hand, Joseph wanted them to leave as soon as possible lest they dally and discover the goblet. On the other hand, he did not send them off at night since he was afraid that, under darkness, they would kill the man he sent after them (*Akeidah; Chizkuni*).

Rav, in *Pesachim* 29 derives from our verse that one should always set out on a journey when it is light, and enter a town while it is still light.

The interpretation of אֹר as a verb meaning that it grew light follows one view in the Talmud, *Pesachim* 2a. According to the other view, אֹר is another name for daybreak. [In Talmudic usage, however, אֹר is used for evening. Thus, אֹר לִאֲרֵבָעָה עָשָׂר means the night of the fourteenth (ad loc.).

וְהָאֲנָשִׁים שָׁלְחוּ — *And the men were sent off.*

— I.e. honorably escorted. See *Rashi* to 12:20; 18:16; and comm. to 24:59.

הֵמָּה וְחֲמִרֵיהֶם — *They and their donkeys.*

— I.e. their fully laden donkeys. This is mentioned to emphasize how their fears that Joseph would detain them and confiscate their donkeys [43:18] were thus far unfounded (*Zohar*).

Tz'ror HaMor postulates that we infer from this passage that no one was permitted to leave Egypt and take his animals with him except by

special permission of the government.

4. הֵם וַיָּצְאוּ אֶת־הָעִיר לֹא הִרְחִיקוּ — *They had left the city — [they] had not gone far.*

— Less than 1 mil [2,000 cubits] away. Joseph was apprehensive that if he let them go away further, they would have been unafraid of his orders and he would not have been able to get them back (*Yalkut Shimoni*).

Furthermore, he wanted to spare them the additional strain of a long trip back (*R' Bachya*).

The term הָעִיר is equivalent to מִן הָעִיר. Cf. *Exod.* 9:29 (*Lekach Tov*).

The term הָעִיר, lit. with the city, Midrashically intimates that they were still within the boundaries of the city which extend 2,000 cubits [תְּחוּם שָׁנָה] in each direction. Hence the *Yalkut's* interpretation above (*R' David Feinstein*).

קוּם רִדֵּף אַחֲרֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים — *Get up, chase after the men.*

— While the fear of the city is still upon them (*Tanchuma*).

וְהִשְׁגָּתָם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם — *When you overtake them [and] you are to say to them.*

I.e. only after you overtake them are you to tell them this; speak to them privately and do not make a scene (*Abarbanel*).

לָמָּה שְׁלַמְתֶּם רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה — *Why did you repay evil for good?* [lit.

³ The day dawned and the men were sent off, they and their donkeys. ⁴ They had left the city, had not gone far, when Joseph said to his steward, "Get up, chase after the men. When you overtake them, you are to say to them, 'Why do you repay evil for good?' ⁵ It is the one from which my master drinks, and he regularly divines with it. You have behaved badly in

why have you repaid evil in place of good?]

Before directly accusing them of stealing the goblet, he accused them of ingratitude, a charge sometimes worse than theft. The assumption was that these words of reproof would crush their courage and put them on the defensive. 'My master invited you to a feast, gave you food and drink at no cost — and you went ahead and rewarded him by stealing his personal utensil!' (*Sechel Tov*).

5. הָלוֹא זֶה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁתֶּה אֲדֹנָי בּוֹ — *It is the one from which my master drinks* [lit. is this not the one from which my master drinks (see Ramban to 40:8 that הָלוֹא is idiomatically equivalent to הֲלוֹא).]

— This charge magnified the enormity of the accusation against them. Someone who would dare steal the royal cup from which a monarch drinks demonstrates disdain for royalty — any bribe or ransom is inadequate to pardon him (*Ramban*).

According to the laws of Egypt, no one but a royal official was permitted to drink out of a silver goblet (*Tz'ror HaMor*).

The steward did not mention the goblet specifically, but spoke generally as if it was quite obvious that they had taken it. It is obvious from their answers in verses 8 and 9

where they mention only silver or gold, that they did not know what he wanted (*Ramban*).

וְהוּא נִחַשׁ נִחַשׁ בּוֹ — *And he regularly divines with it* [the Hebrew is literally in the compound infinitive; and he divines, he divines in it].

— Thus emphasizing even more the enormity of their crime; they had the temerity to steal his personal divining cup! (*Akeidah*; R' Avraham ben HaRambam).

[See Rashi above 43:33 for an example of how Joseph pretended to divine with his goblet.]

Ramban renders: [It is the one from which my master drinks ... and it is obvious that] he would certainly make divination on its account. That is, it was his personal cup and surely you should have known that he would not take its loss lightly, but would ask other diviners who had stolen it — which he in fact did. That is how he knows you are the culprits.

On this form of occult art, see *comm.* to 30:27 s.v. נִחַשׁוּתִי. The commentators explain further that there was a certain art of divination by which one foretold events by the surface motion of wine in a special cup (*Eisens-tein*). All such forms of soothsaying were prohibited by Torah law [cf. *Deut.* 28:10-11].

— Since he divines with it he considers it a bad omen to have lost the cup he usually uses (*Radak*; *Abarbanel*).

According to *Ibn Ezra* — consistent with his *comm.* to 30:27 that נִחַשׁ basically connotes *testing* — the sense

מקץ מד/רט
 ו הרעתם אשר עשיתם: וישגם וידבר
 אלהם את-הדברים האלה: ויאמרו
 אליו למה ידבר אדני בדברים האלה
 ח חלילה לעבדיך מעשות בדבר הזה: הן
 כסף אשר מצאנו בפי אמתחתינו
 השיבנו אליה מארץ כנען ואיה נגנב
 ט מבית אדניך כסף או זהב: אשר ימצא

is: 'and this is the goblet whereby he indeed tested you,' by intentionally placing the goblet in front of you to see whether you would take it. [See HaKsav V'HaKabbalah.]

הרעתם אשר עשיתם — *You have behaved badly in what you have done!*

i.e., by taking the cup, you have destroyed the honest reputation you regained with the return of the money (*Or HaChaim*).

According to *Abarbanel*: You committed this deed badly; because you executed the theft so crudely you were caught.

Since the Generation of the Flood, all great people have been scrupulous against stealing. You, who claim to come from a most prominent home, have trampled the prohibition! (*Sechel Tov*).

— You have acted foolishly and immaturely in three ways:

1. You stole something that is in constant use and would be sorely missed; its absence was immediately noticed.

2. The stolen article belongs to a royal official, who has unlimited power to recover it;

3. The cup is extremely valuable and its owner will not rest until it is returned (*Meam Loez* citing *Toledos Yitzchak*).

7. ויאמרו אליו — *And they said to him.*

Through a spokesman. Therefore, the next phrase has the ex-

pression *my lord* in singular (*Radak*).

למה ידבר אדני בדברים האלה — *Why does my lord say such things?*

— Hurling accusations at all of us? (*Sforno*).

You yourself admitted earlier that we were honest men [33:23] (*Ralbag*).

[On the phrase *האֵלֶּה* being synonymous with *הַדְּבָרִים*, see *Ramban* to 39:19.]

ח חלילה לעבדיך מעשות בדבר הזה — *It would be sacrilegious [lit. a sacrilege] for your servants to do [lit. from doing] such a thing!*

— Or anything similar to it (*Sechel Tov*).

Have we not demonstrated that we do not care for money? (*Abarbanel*).

— I.e., it would be a 'profanation' [*חולין*] for us; we would be ashamed to do such a thing! *Onkelos* interpretively translated [lit. *a sacrilege*] חס as חֲסִי [lit. *merciful protection*]. Thus, according to him the expression idiomatically means: 'God mercifully protect us from such an act!' Cf. the frequently quoted Talmudic expression חס ושלום [*'Chas V'Shalom!*'] [lit. *merciful protection and peace*, in the sense of *Heaven forfend!*].

[See *comm.* to 18:25 s.v. חלילה לך.]

what you have done!' "

⁶ He overtook them and spoke those words to them. ⁷ And they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? It would be sacrilegious for your servants to do such a thing! ⁸ Here, look: the money that we found in the mouth of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we have stolen from your master's house any silver or

R' Hirsch perceives חֵלֶקֶת to be related to חֵלֶק, corpse, and renders accordingly: 'We would regard the commission of such an act as a deathblow to our moral character.'

8. הֵן — Look [lit. here].

Synonymous with the idiomatic הִנֵּה, behold (Ramban).

בְּסָף...הִשְׁבֵּנוּ אֵלָיו מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — The money that we found in the mouth of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan.

I.e. all the way from the land of Canaan — a great distance away where it might never have been discovered, and after so long a lapse of time (Akeidah).

וְאֵיךְ נִגְבַּח מִבֵּית אֲדֹנֶיךָ בְּסָף אִו זֶהָ — How then could we have stolen from your master's house any silver or gold?⁽¹⁾

Their argument, known in Tal-

mudic literature as *kal va'chomer*, (a *fortiori*, deduction from 'minor to major') was based on simple logic: If they proved their honesty by bringing all the way back from Canaan money that they had not even taken, how could they now be accused of having gone on to steal?⁽²⁾

They displayed their ignorance of what he sought by not referring specifically to a goblet but vaguely to silver or gold (Ramban).

Furthermore, by this vagueness they were trying to fortify their claim of innocence by implying that since they were not familiar with the occult art of divination — such practises being forbidden to them — it was merely an object of silver or gold; to them it had no worth besides its intrinsic value (Ralbag; Or HaChaim).

By the above they were also anticipating a possible refutation of their *kal va'chomer* [a *fortiori*] argument. For

1. Rashi mentions that this is one of the ten *a fortiori* arguments mentioned in the Torah. They are all enumerated in *Bereishis Rabbah*.

The other nine listed in the *Midrash* are: *Exod.* 6:12; *Numb.* 12:14; *Deut.* 31:27; *I Samuel* 23:3; *Jeremiah* 12:5; loc. cit.; *Prov.* 11:31; *Esther* 9:12; *Ezekiel* 15:5 (some editions substitute the last with *Gen.* 4:24).

Although Rashi uses the term 'Torah' [usually limited to the first Five Books], he obviously refers to all of *Tanach*, [i.e. the twenty-four Books of Prophets and Writings]. The Talmud often uses 'Torah' in this broader designation (*Sefer HaZikaron*).

2. *Alshich* and *Malbim* explain the significance of their carefully chosen words:

The money — coins have no distinctive מִקָּץ, mark proving of ownership. *That we found* — the emphasis is on *found*; we did not steal it; *in the mouth of our sacks* — that something is found in a person's personal property gives him a presumption of ownership; *we brought back to you* — we returned it of our own volition, without anyone even telling us it was missed; *from the land of Canaan* — i.e., we brought it back from our own domain. Therefore *how could we have stolen?* — stealing is quite different from 'finding' something; *from your master's house* — finding something in the viceroy's house is far different from seeing it in the mouth of our sacks; *silver or gold* — a silver object quite identifiably its owners! (*Alshich*; *Malbim*).

מקץ
מד/י-יא
אתו מעבדך ומת וגם אנחנו נהיה
לארני לעבדים: ויאמר גם-עתה
כדברכם כן-הוא אשר ימצא אתו
יהיה-לי עבד ואתם תהיו נקיים: וימהרו

the steward could have retorted, 'You returned the money because you are wealthy and the sum was not so great, or because you wanted to gain our trust so you could steal something more precious; this does not necessarily prove your innocence in this case where a priceless object, such as my master's goblet, was stolen.' This is why they claimed that to them it was nothing more than a piece of silver — whereas the money they returned was far more valuable (*Sifsei Kohen*; cf. *Or HaChaim*).

[It is unclear, however, why the steward could not have refuted their *a fortiori* argument by saying: 'Your return of the money proves nothing. We were holding your brother as a hostage and you were convinced that the money had been planted on you to implicate you in a plot; you returned the money only to ingratiate yourselves, and because you feared the consequences of not returning it. Now, however, all of you were leaving the land and you had no such restraints on you; you certainly stole it, as ' will proceed to prove.' רצ"ע.]

9. [Although the brothers vehemently denied the charge, they went even further. So certain were they that none of them was guilty that they agreed to accept an unusually harsh punishment if the cup was found among them]:

— אשר ימצא אתו מעבדך ומת
Anyone among your servants with

whom it is found shall die [lit. that it shall be found with him of your servants, and he shall die].

— Since he is the thief (*Ramban*).

In so saying they emulated their father Jacob who protested the innocence of his retinue by telling Laban [31:32]: *With whomever you find your gods, he shall not live* (*Bereishis Rabbosi*).¹¹

Their intention, in proposing a penalty severer than the law demanded was to demonstrate their certainty in their innocence (*Rablag*).

— וגם אנחנו נהיה לארני לעבדים
And we, also, will become slaves to my lord.

They were so convinced that all were innocent that if any one of them were found guilty, they were all ready to offer themselves as slaves since they were suspected of conspiring with the thief (*Bereishis Rabbosi*).

Comp. the Midrash: 'If one of a company of ten is convicted of theft, are they not all indeed liable to imprisonment?'

Ramban disagrees and maintains that such was not the law, since only if they conceived and executed the theft with mutual consent and

1. Why did Benjamin not die prematurely as a result of that curse as did Rachel as a result of Jacob's curse [see *comm.* to 31:32]?

— Unlike Rachel who, despite her noble motive, committed a theft, Benjamin was completely innocent, since the steward had placed the goblet in his sack.

However, how did the brothers utter this imprecation, knowing as they did that someone could have planted the goblet in their packs and their words might come back to haunt them?

— They carefully chose their words. By saying lit. 'that it shall be found with him' they specifically meant on his person, but not in his pack. Nevertheless, since the purpose of the charge was to ensnare them, not to establish the truth, their protestations were ineffective (*Moshav Zekeinim*).

44 gold? ⁹ *Anyone among your servants with whom it is found shall die, and we also will become slaves to my lord.*"

¹⁰ *He replied, "Although what you say now is also correct, nevertheless, with whomever it is found shall be my slave, but the rest of you shall be exonerated."*

knowledge is the entire group guilty. He postulates that they were pleading that since they knew nothing about the crime, they could not all be held responsible for the sin of one. It was only as a form of voluntary punishment that they offered to become slaves. They made this gesture to demonstrate complete faith in their innocence.

10. The steward agrees but not to their exaggerated proposal.

גַּם עֲתָה כְּדִבְרֵיכֶם כִּי־הוּא — *Although what you say now is also correct* [lit. *also now as per your words it is so*].

[Following the Midrashic interpretation]: The law is indeed as you say. A whole group is liable to imprisonment for the act of one of its members (*Rashi*) ...

Following *Ramban*:

גַּם עֲתָה, *also now*, the fact that you are now all found together, is presumptive evidence that *as your word it is so*, i.e. that you all participated in the theft and are guilty.

Alternately [in an interpretation more closely related to *Rashi's*], *Ramban* interprets: Although you suggest that your offering to become slaves is merely voluntary, you are wrong since there is a suspicion on all of you, and you should be arrested until the matter is clarified. Nevertheless, *as per your words* — that you are innocent of the theft and unaware that it even happened — *so shall it be*. I will free all but the culprit.

Chizkuni perceives the tenor of the

dialogue to be: Although, by your own admission, the thief would be worthy of the death penalty, nevertheless I will not be so harsh ...

Sforno: Because the stolen article belongs to the viceroy, your proposed punishment is not sufficiently excessive, nevertheless I will be lenient and not exact the full measure of justice.

אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצָא אִתּוֹ יִהְיֶה לִי עֶבֶד — [Nevertheless], *with whomever it is found shall be my slave*. [The steward speaks on behalf of Joseph; therefore he uses the expression 'my' slave.]

Rashi: [Though by law you are guilty] ... I will be magnanimous and *only* the thief will be punished with slavery.

The judgment will be clear-cut. There will be no discussion of how the crime was committed or how the goblet came into Benjamin's pack (*Yafeh Toar*).

Ramban: Though you are not legally responsible for the crimes of an individual, the presumption of guilt is upon you because of your association. I should keep you imprisoned until your innocence is established; nevertheless, I will accept your plea of innocence. Even if one of you is proven guilty, I will not accept your offer to become slaves, but will hold only the thief. Furthermore, even his punishment will be less than you propose. I will make him my slave, since I desire his services more than his death.

Daas Zekeinim: Now, too, it is as you said: You claimed all along that

מקץ מר/יביד י ב יורדו איש את-אמתחתו ארצה
 י נפתחו איש אמתחתו: ויחפש בגדול
 החל ובקטן כלה וימצא הגביע
 י באמתחת בנימן: ויקרעו שמלתם
 ויעמס איש על-חמרו וישבו העירה:
 ° מפטיר יר ° ויבא יהודה ואחיו ביתה יוסף והוא

you were honest people, and you proved it by returning the money. However, your younger brother whom I never saw until now has not established his honesty and he might have stolen it without your knowledge. Therefore I say: *the one with whom it is found shall be my slave, but the rest of you shall be exonerated.*

— Of course, the steward knew all along in whose sack the goblet had been hidden (*R' Hirsch*).

But [the rest of] you shall be exonerated [lit. clean].

For perhaps, as you claim, you did not collaborate together in stealing the goblet (*Ramban*).

You will be free to return home. This too was a test to see whether they would willingly leave Benjamin behind (*Haamek Davar*).

11. ... וימהרו — *Hurriedly* [lit. and they made haste].

— Anxious to prove their innocence (*Zohar*).

— *And each one opened* [lit. and they opened (each man) his sack].

This was further demonstration of their eagerness to exonerate themselves as quickly as possible. They did not wait for him to open their sacks; each one opened his own and offered to be searched first (*Bereishis Rabbasi*).

12. [And] he searched.

I.e., he went through the motions of searching (*Midrash*).

He began with the oldest and ended with the youngest.

So they should not suspect that he actually knew where it had been hidden (*Rashi; Alshich*).

— *וימצא הגביע באמתחת בנימן* — *And the goblet was found in Benjamin's sack.*

The *Midrash* relates that when the goblet was found in Benjamin's sack, the disgraced brothers began pouncing upon him and taunting him: 'Woe, thief! Son of a thieving woman! You have disgraced us by stealing, just as your mother disgraced Father by stealing the *teraphim*' [31:34]. Benjamin countered by calling them thieves who had orchestrated the sale of their own brother. [The tenor of Benjamin's reply was that he was suspicious that *they* might have stolen the goblet and planted it in his pack to incriminate him, and thereby create a pretext to rid themselves of him just as they had disposed of Joseph (*Beis HaLevi*)].

According to another view, they kept beating him until he swore by the life of his father that he had committed no crime and was innocent. It was only after they heard him take this oath that they believed him and ceased taunting him.

The Sages maintain that in com-

- 11-14 Hurriedly, each one lowered his sack to the ground and each one opened his sack ¹² He searched; he began with the oldest and ended with the youngest. And the goblet was found in Benjamin's sack. ¹³ They rent their garments. Each one reloaded his donkey and they returned to the city.
- ¹⁴ When Judah arrived with his brothers to

pensation for the undeserved blows, he merited the privilege of the Divine Presence 'dwelling between his shoulders' [a metaphoric allusion to the Temple which would later be built in Benjamin's territory. See Deut. 33:12 *Midrash; Tanchuma Yashan; Zohar*]. It is with such a thought in mind that R' Yose declared [*Moed Katan 18b*]: 'May my share be with him whom they suspect of something of which he is innocent.'

13. ויקרעו שקליהם. — [And] they rent their garments.

— In grief (*Ibn Caspi*).

Their distress was magnified by the fact that it happened to be Benjamin, and they agonized over the potential fatal grief it would cause Jacob when he would learn of it (*Ralbag; Abarbanel*).

The *Midrash* — noting that no act ever goes unrewarded or unpunished — records that the brothers were put into a position of rending their garments in grief in retribution for having caused Jacob to rend his garments when they sent him Joseph's blood-stained tunic [37:34].^[1]

Benjamin, too, was not unscathed. In-

nocent though he may have been, the very fact that his plight was what caused the brothers to tear their garments meant that he must have had some share of guilt; otherwise God would not have made him the cause of their grief. In retribution for this, according to *Yalkut Shimoni* to *Esther*, Benjamin's descendant Mordechai tore his clothes in Shushan in response to Haman's decree of annihilation against the Jews.

וַיַּעֲמֵס אִישׁ עַל דּוֹמָיו — [And] each one reloaded [singular] his donkey.

They were strong, and did not need each other's assistance to do so (*Rashi*).

Sechel Tov asserts that it usually requires two men to lift a donkey's load.

וַיָּשׁוּבוּ הָעִירָה — And they returned to the city.

It was a metropolis, yet Scripture refers to it as עִיר, an ordinary city! This intimates that it ranked no higher in their eyes than a township of ten should they have to wage war against it (*Rashi*).

14. וַיָּבֹא יְהוּדָה וְאָחָיו בֵּיתָהּ יוֹסֵף. — When Judah arrived with his brothers to Joseph's house.

They were directed to go to

1. Additionally, since Menasseh was the agent who caused the brothers to tear their garments, he, too, suffered retribution: his territory in *Eretz Yisrael* was 'torn', in the sense that it was bisected by the Jordan River (*Tanchuma*).

This might be the reason Menasseh is not identified as the steward. The Torah wanted to avoid later hatred of him by the tribes for his role in their tribulation, and also prevent an accusation that he was chosen for this mission since he himself was guilty of some misdeed and 'evil is brought through the guilty' [cf. footnote p. 529] (*Yalkut Yehudah*).

מִקֵּץ טו עֲרֹנּוֹ שָׁם וַיִּפְּלוּ לִפְנֵי אֶרְצָה: וַיֹּאמֶר
 לָהֶם יוֹסֵף מַה-הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר
 עָשִׂיתֶם הֲלוֹא יָדַעְתֶּם כִּי-יִנְחַשׁ יִנְחַשׁ
 אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר בְּמִנִּי: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה מַה- טו
 נֹאמַר לְאֹדְנִי מַה-נִּדְבָּר וּמַה-נִּצְטָדֵק
 הָאֱלֹהִים מִצָּא אֶת-עֵינָי עֲבָדֶיךָ הַנֶּנּוּ

Joseph's house because he wanted to spare them the shame of appearing before other Egyptians (*Midrash HaGadol*).

Only Judah is specifically mentioned since he had assumed responsibility for Benjamin's safe return, and he therefore assumed the leading role (*Rabag*).

— *[And] he was still there.*

— Waiting for them (*Rashi*).

I.e., he did not leave his house that day to judge the people, but waited for them at home so he could meet them in private (*Tanchuma*).

— *[And] they fell [i.e. threw themselves] to the ground before him.*

In obeisance. According to *Tanchuma*, it was now that Joseph's dream of the eleven bowing stars [37:9] was fulfilled.

15. With affected indignation, Joseph reproaches them for what they have done.

— *מה-הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם* — *What is this deed that you have perpetrated?*

— It was both wicked and foolish, for you should have known that you could not succeed (*Sforno*).

הֲלוֹא יָדַעְתֶּם כִּי-יִנְחַשׁ יִנְחַשׁ אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר בְּמִנִּי — *Do you not realize that a man like me practices divination?*

Don't you realize that a noble man like me knows how to divine, and [though now deprived of my goblet] that I would be able to determine by my own logic and reason that it was you who stole the goblet? (*Rashi*).

Joseph did not chide them about their ingratitude, as Menasseh had done earlier, because it would have been beneath his dignity to invoke the kindness he had shown them (*Alshich; Haamek Davar*).

16. — *וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה* — *So Judah said.*

Judah speaks on their behalf [see v. 14] and attempts no excuse, for the facts seem to allow none (*Abarbanel*).

— *מה נאמר לאדני מה נדבר ומה-נצטדק* — *What can we say to my lord? How can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves?*

What can we say to my lord in answer to your question, 'What is this deed that you have done?' Realistically, *How can we speak?* i.e., in denial of the charge, although we are innocent, for *how can we justify ourselves?* — to establish unequivocally that the charge was fabricated? (*Sforno*).^[1]

— Since Benjamin is the 'culprit,' we cannot even invoke the *a fortiori* argument of v. 8 since Benjamin had not participated in the return of

1. Judah used three forms of expression: נאמר: what can we say to touch your heart and gain your compassion; נדבר: on what grounds can we speak strongly and insist on our rights; נצטדק: how can we justify ourselves. Of one thing we are certain; though we know we

44 Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell to the
15-16 ground before him. ¹⁵ Joseph said to them, "What is
this deed that you have perpetrated? Do you not
realize that a man like me practices divination!"

¹⁶ So Judah said, "What can we say to my lord?
How can we speak? And how can we justify
ourselves? God has uncovered the sin of your ser-
vants. Here we are: we are ready to be slaves to my

the money (Or HaChaim).

What can we say to my lord in our defense? How can we speak to my father to whom I assured Benjamin's safety? And how can we justify ourselves before the Divine Presence? (Tanchuma Yashan).

Rashi provides an instructive grammatical insight to explain the form of the word נצטק, justify ourselves, which, he notes, is a form of the word צדק, righteous.

He cites the following regarding the conjugation of the His'pael and Nis'pael forms: every word whose first root letter is a צ takes a prefix ט instead of the usual נ; furthermore the ט does not precede the first root-letter as is usual in His'pael-Nis'pael forms [such as, נחצק from the root (נצח) but between the first two letters of the root as follows צדק=נצטק; Daniel 4:13: צבע=ויצטבע; Joshua 9:4: ויטערו=ציר; Micah 12:5: ויסתכל=סבל; Exod. 9:17: וישתמרו=שמר; מסחולל].

are innocent of this charge, we must have sinned on some other occasion for which we are being punished now. The punishment was ironic, indeed. Benjamin had been summoned to establish their integrity, and now he is found to be a thief. They must have been convinced that the old charge of spying would again be hurled at them and, as before, they would be sentenced to slavery.

Only after Joseph proclaimed that Benjamin alone would be punished did Judah dare make the argument that begins in v. 18 (R' Hirsch).

1. R' Levi said: This is comparable to a man who lent money to ten people in partnership. While they were dispersed, he could not make his claim against them; but when they came together, he had the chance to exact his debt.

R' Isaac interpreted: 'The Creditor has now found the occasion to exact his debt.' We shared in the sin of selling [Joseph], but up to now we were not together, for Judah went down from his brothers [38:1]. Now, however, we are all together — so God uncovered that iniquity, not the 'crime' of the theft [of which we are now accused].

Joseph said to him [Judah], "If what you say is true, how is it that this brother of yours [Benjamin] has come to sin?"

Judah answered, "Whoever is caught with a thief is punished with him; he has been seized

הָאֱלֹהִים מָצָא אֶת עֲוֹן עֲבָדָיךָ — God has uncovered [lit. found] the sin of your servants.

[Elohim is introduced with the definite article ה: The God, as if to say that this is a pronounced instance of God's exercise of Strict Justice.]

"We know we committed no wrong in this matter. Rather it emanates from God, Who caused all of this to befall us because He wishes to seize this opportunity to punish us for an earlier sin. It is as if the previous misdeed had lain in abeyance, but now it is uncovered — found, as it were — to be dealt with. 'The Creditor has found an opportunity to collect His debt' (Rashi from Midrash).^[1]

The sense is: 'God has found [the opportunity for exacting retribution for] the sin of your servants.' They referred

עֲבָדִים לְאֲדֹנָי גַם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַם אֲשֶׁר־נִמְצָא
הַגָּבִיעַ בְּיָדוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר חֲלִילָה לִי מַעֲשֹׂת
זֹאת הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נִמְצָא הַגָּבִיעַ בְּיָדוֹ הוּא
יְהִי־לִי עֶבֶד וְאַתֶּם עָלוּ לְשָׁלוֹם אֶל־
אֲבִיכֶם:

מקץ
מד/יז

not to the sin of stealing the goblet of which they were innocent, but to the sin of selling Joseph, which they committed long ago, but which God was now repaying through the instrumentality of the Egyptian viceroy (*Tzeidah laDerech, Sforno*).

It is not to you that we are guilty, but to God for an old sin that seemed to be forgotten and is now disclosed. Alternatively: עֲוֹן, *iniquity*, in this context refers to the *punishment* for wrongdoing [cf. 4:13], and God is now punishing us for a sin (*Ibn Ezra*).

וְהָנּוּ עֲבָדִים לְאֲדֹנָי — *We are ready to be [lit. here we are].*

[The translation follows *Rashi* to 22:1 who explains הָנָנִי as an expression of submission and readiness to accept an assignment.]

We are, as I tried to convince you, all innocent in this matter, and therefore we *all* deserve nothing more harsh than becoming slaves to you (*Abarbanel*).

Judah, as the brother responsible for Benjamin could not bring himself to allow the others to depart without Benjamin. He proposed that they all remain as slaves in the hope that by staying together — even as slaves — they would eventually find a way to escape (*Akeidah*).

גַם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַם אֲשֶׁר נִמְצָא הַגָּבִיעַ בְּיָדוֹ —

Both we [lit. also we] and the one in whose hand the goblet was found.

Because we are all equally innocent, are being punished by God for an entirely different sin, therefore — although earlier we advocated death for the one in whose hand the goblet was found [v. 9] — we now ask that we *all* become your slaves instead (*Akeidah*).

17. Joseph presses his advantage home, and in order to make them realize more keenly their precarious position, he declares that he will retain Benjamin alone.

חֲלִילָה לִי מַעֲשֹׂת זֹאת — *It would be sacrilegious [lit. a sacrilege] for me to do [lit. from doing] this.*

It would be sacrilegious for me to punish you for a former sin and thereby be like a 'wicked person from whom there proceeds wickedness' (*Sforno*).

Following *Ramban* in v. 10: *Far be it for me to keep you all as slaves and thus deal with you more harshly than the assurance of my steward who said that you would be exonerated [v. 10]; no — I am the judge of the whole land; far be it from me to do you wrong.*

הָאִישׁ — *The man.*

— Benjamin, the thief, is a man,

for our [old] crime, not for the theft of the goblet"

Said Joseph to him: "I have no interest in this. He against Whom you sinned will exact retribution from you, but I will not be His tool. I will act according to the law that a thief is imprisoned. As for you, you may go in peace to your father" (*Midrash in Tzror HaMor*, cited in *Torah Sheleimah* #38).

lord — both we and the one in whose hand the goblet was found.”

¹⁷ But he replied, “It would be sacrilegious for me to do this. The man in whose possession the goblet was found, only he shall be my slave, and as for you — go up in peace to your father.”

and fully responsible for his actions. He is not the קטן, *innocent* ‘little one’ as you choose to call him (*Alshich*).

וְהָיָה לִי עֶבֶד — [Only] he shall be my slave.

Only he — the perpetrator of this crime — will be punished by me (*Sforno*).

Meshech Chochmah observes that Joseph’s judgment intimated to the brothers that he knew Benjamin to be innocent, otherwise he would never have allowed a thief to be a servant in the house. He was fabricating the charge to detain an innocent man as his servant. This gave Judah the courage to offer himself as a substitute. [Cf. *Midrash HaChofetz in Torah Sheleimah* #43.]

Tur notes that the unusual vocalization עֶבֶד instead of עָבֵד — in this case where such a spelling is not mandated by a disjunctive punctuation — implies an insinuation that Joseph would keep him as a special kind of slave.

וְאַתָּם עָלוּ לְשָׁלוֹם אֶל אֲבִיהֶם — And as for you — go up in peace to your father.

It now became apparent to Judah that this was not a Divine punishment for their former sins or else all of them would have been enslaved.

It was either the viceroy’s capriciousness, or the result of some sin of Benjamin. Therefore, from this point on, Judah began exercising his responsibility to do whatever he could for Benjamin (*Haamek Davar*).

The precariousness of their position, and the ensuing consequences, inspires Judah in the following verses, to step forward and offer an eloquent personal appeal on Benjamin’s behalf. But it is at this suspenseful point that the *Sidrah* closes.^[1]

According to the Masoretic note appearing at the end of the *Sidrah*, there are 146 verses in the *Sidrah* numerically corresponding to the mnemonics יְחִזְקִיָּהוּ, [Yechizkiyahu], אֶמַצְיָהוּ, [Amatzyah], וְהָיָה לִי עֶבֶד, [he shall be My slave]. The *Sidrah* contains 2,025 letters. The *Haftorah* begins with *I Kings* 3:1 וַיָּקֶץ שְׁלֹמֹה.

The names Yechizkiyahu and Amatzyah are the same as the mnemonics used for the *Sidrah Bereishis*, implying that the two portions have common themes. *Bereishis*, the portion of Creation, proclaims God’s all-powerful majesty; as Creator of the universe, only He sustains it and determines its course, whatever pretensions man may have to the contrary. In *Parshas Mikeitz*, we find Pharaoh considering himself a god and Egypt worshipping the Nile as its deity. Through the devices of abundance and famine, God displays beyond doubt that only His is the

1. What could Joseph have done if the brothers had accepted his judgment that only Benjamin stay behind — would he have subjected Jacob to such an awful blow? Undoubtedly Joseph would have revealed himself immediately.

But he would have invited only Jacob and Benjamin to come live near him in Egypt, for it would have been proven, tragically, that the brothers still harbored their jealous hatred for Rachel’s children. But now that they showed themselves ready to sacrifice for Benjamin’s sake, he could reveal himself in loving brotherhood, and begin the process of fulfilling God’s prophecy to Abraham of the Egyptian exile (*Oznaim LaTorah*).

power. Pharaoh and his people are forced to acknowledge that they are subservient to Joseph whose distinction is in the fact that whatever his position — slave or viceroy — he remains but a servant of God: **יְהִיָּה לִי עֶבֶד**, *He shall be My slave*.

R' Baruch Epstein [*Torah Temimah*] notes that this is the only portion in the Torah where a mnemonic is provided for the number of words, in this case 2025. He finds in this an allusion to Chanukah, which falls in the week of *Parshas Mikeitz*. On Chanukah, we light a new **נר**, *lamp*, for each of the eight nights. The numerical value of **נר**

is 250; accordingly the eight lights of Chanukah give a total of 2000. Chanukah begins on the *twenty-fifth* of Kislev. Thus, 2025 is an allusion to the lights and the date of Chanukah.

The theme of Chanukah is especially appropriate to *Mikeitz*. On Chanukah we commemorate even the first day's burning, even though the jug of oil was big enough to burn for a day without miraculous intervention. By doing so we testify to our belief, that even the seemingly 'natural' process of burning oil is in essence a miracle because it is a manifestation of God's will (see *Overview*).

נשלם סדר מקץ נשלם כרך ה מספר בראשית בעזרת האל

Meir Zlotowitz
Iyar, 5740/May, 1980
Brooklyn, New York

סדר ויגש

Sidrah Vayigash

— *The Overviews*

15

16

17

18

19

An Overview/ Judah and Joseph*

ואת יהודה שלח לפניו, זה שאמר הכתוב המשל
נפחד עמו עשה שלום במרומו. המשל, זה
מיכאל; נפחד, זה גבריאל. מיכאל מן המים
וגבריאל מן האש, והן עומדין לפני השכינה ואינן
מזיקין זה את זה. הוי אומר עשה שלום במרומו
... יהודה ניוסף ... אתמול מתנגחין זה עם זה,
ועכשיו הוא משלחו אצלנו שנאמר ואת יהודה
שלח לפניו. הוי, עשה שלום במרומו.

*And he [Jacob] sent Judah before him
(46:28). Scripture alludes to this: Dominion
and fear are with him, He who makes
peace in His heights (Job 25:2). Dominion
refers to Michael and fear refers to Gabriel.
Michael is of water and Gabriel of fire, but
they stand before God's Presence and do
not harm one another. Say [about this] He
Who makes peace in His heights ...*

*Judah and Joseph ... yesterday they
clashed with one another and now [Jacob]
sends [Judah] to [Joseph]! Say [about this],
He Who makes peace in His heights
(Tanchuma Vayigash).*

I. Unity in Diversity

Spokes of a Wheel **D**uring World War I, the eastern battlefield cut through much of the most intensely Jewish parts of Poland and Russia and many hundreds of thousands of Jews — among them some of the great yeshivos and leading rabbinic leaders — were forced to flee and become wandering refugees. One of them was Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, the Chofetz Chaim, who took part of his yeshiva with him deeper into

*Most of the Overview is drawn from the thought of *Harav* Gedaliah Schorr זצ"ל, much of which is collected in *Ohr Gedaliahu*.

Obviously the country's new Communist masters put 'parasitic' Talmudists at the very bottom of their list.

Russia. By the time the war had ended, the Bolshevik Revolution had taken place, not only making it nearly impossible for them to return to Poland, but putting them at the mercy of Communist commissars for food at a time when Russia was near famine. Obviously the country's new Communist masters put 'parasitic' Talmudists at the very bottom of their list, and the yeshiva students suffered from severe deprivation.

One Sabbath the distraught Chofetz Chaim took a walk, deep in thought, wondering how he could get food for his students. The larder was empty and the suffering was great. Ahead of him he noticed the Russian official in charge of distributing food. He was a former yeshiva student who had become a Communist and, like many converts, took extra pains to convince his colleagues that his conversion was real. The man's Hebrew name was Aaron and he had once been called 'Archik.'

As they met, the Chofetz Chaim said, '*Gut Shabbos, Reb Archik.*'

Archik replied roughly, 'For me today is no different from any other day.'

The Chofetz Chaim said, 'Let me tell you a *vort* (a thought) on today's Torah portion.'

'You know I don't believe in the Torah any more.'

'Just the same, everyone likes to hear a clever idea. The Torah specifies that God placed the Tree of Life in the center of the Garden of Eden [Genesis 2:9]. Why did He put it in the center and why was it necessary for Him to inform us where He put it? He wanted everyone to have equal access to it. There are many ways for someone to reach the Tree of Spiritual Life. Some people do it through Torah study, some through *mitzvos*, and some through kindness to other people. You no longer study the Torah, Reb Archik, and you no longer believe in Sabbath or the other *mitzvos*. But you are a good-hearted man. I want you to know that my students are starving! *Gut Shabbos*, Reb Archik.' The Chofetz Chaim nodded his head and walked on.

There are many ways for someone to reach the Tree of Spiritual Life.

You are a good-hearted man. I want you to know that my students are starving!

That night just after the Sabbath ended, a

wagonload of food was delivered to the yeshiva.

*The Chofetz
Chaim's
unpretentious
nature and gift for
simplicity often
obscured the depth
of even his casual
conversation.*

The Chofetz Chaim's unpretentious nature and gift for simplicity often obscured the depth of even his casual conversation. Although his *vort* was calculated to soften Reb Archik's animosity toward committed Jews, his observation regarding the Tree of Life was true and profound: the Torah provides the Jew many ways to perceive his mission on earth, many ways to reach his goal.

While this concept is found in the differing roles of the Patriarchs [see Overview to *Lech Lecha*], it received greatest expression in the phenomenon of the Twelve Tribes. Each of Jacob's sons, the ancestors of the tribes, was unique in that each was assigned a particular mode of service, a special role in fulfilling the national mission of Israel. The nation is a mosaic of these parts, or, in the Chofetz Chaim's analogy to Archik, Israel is like a wheel with the Tree of Life at its center and twelve tribal spokes flaring out from it. The spokes are important individually, but their greatest significance lies in their interaction. Both Jacob and Moses blessed the tribes (*Genesis* ch. 49; *Deuteronomy* ch. 33) and, as the blessings make clear, each tribe had a unique role to play in the national destiny: Judah had monarchy; Issachar, Torah; Zebulun, commerce; and so on [see comm. to the respective blessings in chapter 49]. Of course, the specific blessing conferred upon one tribe did not exclude it from sharing those of the others. Jacob concluded his testament by giving all his sons a joint blessing, declaring that each would share in the gifts of his brothers (49:28, see comm.). This meant that all the tribes would enjoy the regal nature of a Judah and the agricultural success of a Naftali, and so on — nevertheless each tribe would be distinguished especially by the particular characteristics mentioned in its own blessing.

*Jacob concluded
his testament by
giving all his sons
a joint blessing,
nevertheless each
tribe would be
distinguished.*

Oneness of Israel *Sfas Emes* likens Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to the written, revealed Torah, in the sense that they formed the spiritual basis of the nation. Though they differed from one another, the three formed a unit,

not only as an epoch in Israel's history, but as the foundation of their people's very existence. It is as if a new creation began with the Patriarchs; we are not described as בני נח, *descendants of Noah*, as is the rest of the human race — we are called the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. After the Patriarchs, a new epoch began, that of the Twelve Tribes, each of which had its own role within the guidelines of the Torah. Sfats Emes likens the Tribes to the י"ג מדות *the thirteen hermeneutic principles of Scriptural interpretation*. Each principle has its function, but if a scholar attempted to interpret the Torah by using only two or three — or even eleven or twelve — of the principles, he would have a flawed, false picture of the Torah. Each principle has its specific rules and applications, but it cannot be seen in isolation from the others. The principles complement each other to provide a complete, accurate understanding of the Law.

If a scholar attempted to interpret the Torah by using only two or three — or even eleven or twelve — of the principles, he would have a flawed, false picture of the Torah.

Similarly, when the tribes complement one another, joining their disparate natures to make a united nation, they parallel the many facets of the Oral Law, all deriving from the Written Torah to form a unified whole. The parallel goes further: when the Tribes act in concert, they are likened on earth to the Oneness of God Himself, as it were.

Every day the Jew accepts upon himself the yoke of God's sovereignty [קבלת עול מלכות שמים] by reciting the *Shema*: *Hear, O Israel, HASHEM Who is our God is אחד* *ה' אחד*, *the One and Only God*. As many commentators note, the letters of אחד, *One*, allude to the all-encompassing power that makes God unique. The letter א, with the value of one, alludes of course to His absolute indivisibility and Oneness. The letter ח, with the numerical value of eight, refers to the seven heavens — representing different levels of spirituality — and the earth; the letter ד, with the value of four, refers to all four directions of the compass, meaning that God's sovereignty is everywhere. Thus the full word represents the concept that God is One, as expressed by his absolute power in all twelve areas and directions: the seven heavens above, the

The full word represents the concept that God is One, as expressed by his absolute power in all twelve areas and directions.

earth below, and all four directions.

The Midrash draws parallels between Israel's uniqueness and God's, as it were.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts for a united Israel is the bearer of God's glory on earth, while a factionalized Israel brings discredit to the One.

The same word *אֶחָד* *one*, describes Israel, for it is said of us *וְיָמִי כְעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ*, *who is like Your nation Israel, a unique [lit. one] nation in the world* (1 Chronicles 17:21). Indeed the Midrash draws parallels between Israel's uniqueness and God's, as it were. In the case of Israel, too, the letters of *אֶחָד* describe the nation. Its last two letters equal twelve, the twelve tribes, and the letter *א*, *one*, refers to the national entity of a *united* nation. Its tribes are separate and distinct — as they must be if each is to carry out its individual function — but when they work together as a united nation, they merge into a single unit. It is as if Israel is described as a single nation composed of twelve parts; indeed, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts for a united Israel is the bearer of God's glory on earth, while a factionalized Israel brings discredit to the One Who made it His chosen people.

The Stones Unite

Jacob feared that this withdrawal of the Divine Presence might have been caused by unworthiness on the part of his sons.

Jacob had in mind this indispensable need for national unity in diversity when he summoned his children to receive his death-bed blessings and when he wished to reveal the secret of the End of Days. He emphasized and repeated that they must 'gather together' (49:1-2), for Israel can rise to its greatest moments only when it is united, and he specifically warned them against discord (*Bereishis Rabbah* 98:2). The Sages report that God did not wish Jacob to disclose the time when the Messiah would herald the end of all exiles, so knowledge of this event was withdrawn from him (*Pesachim* 56a; *Bereishis Rabbah* 98:3; see footnote to 49:1). Jacob feared that this withdrawal of the Divine Presence might have been caused by unworthiness on the part of one or more of his sons:

אָמַר שְׁמָא חַס וְשָׁלוֹם יֵשׁ בְּמִשְׁתֵּי פֶסֶל בְּאַבְרָהָם
שִׁינָא מִמֶּנּוּ יִשְׁמַעֲאֵל, וְאֵבִי יִחְזַק שִׁינָא מִמֶּנּוּ
עֲשׂוֹ

[Jacob] said, 'Perhaps, God forbid, there is a disqualification among my offspring, like Abraham from whom Ishmael was

born and my father Isaac from whom Esau was born' (Pesachim 56a)?

What if his suspicion were correct? Could anyone find serious fault with a family that produced one laggard among twelve sons who were among the great *tzaddikim* of all time?

In the case of Jacob's family, the answer is yes.

Jacob's fearful question suggests that he had no fear that all his sons were unrighteous; he feared only that *one* of them had become unworthy — that he had produced an Ishmael or an Esau. We may well wonder — what if his suspicion were correct? Could anyone find serious fault with a family that produced one laggard among twelve sons who were among the great *tzaddikim* of all time?

In the case of Jacob's family, the answer is yes. Jacob was the last of the Patriarchs; from him issued the twelve tribal ancestors and it was required that he produce and raise the family that would become the *nation* of Israel. When the Sages praise Jacob as *מִטְחָו שְׁלֵמָה*, his *bed* [i.e., offspring] was perfect, they refer to the prerequisite for Jacob's fulfillment of his mission on earth. He knew he would have twelve sons, his wives knew it, and his children knew the heavy responsibility that lay upon them. Jacob's offspring were the intertwined genesis of the *nation* of Israel. They had to be perfect, every one of them, or the national structure would be stillborn. Abraham and Isaac were to have purged the unworthiness represented by Ishmael and Esau so that the Patriarchal role could culminate with Jacob, a culmination that would result in a family of unblemished righteousness. If Jacob, too, had produced an unworthy son, the nation could not have begun then either, and the Patriarchal task would not have been accomplished.

The Sages teach that Jacob took twelve stones; if they coalesced to form a single one he would know that his family, would be united.

This need for unity in perfection was revealed to Jacob at the time he was shown his vision of the ladder and heard God's promise to return him unharmed for his soon-to-begin personal exile in the home of Laban (28:13-15). As he lay down to sleep there on Mount Moriah, he had arranged stones around his head (28:11). The Sages teach that Jacob took twelve stones; if they coalesced to form a single one, he would know that his family, unlike that of Abraham and Isaac, would be united and therefore capable of being Israel's forerunner (*Pirkei d'Rabbi*

Eliezer; Bereishis Rabbah 68:11). So it was: the stones cleaved and Jacob knew. The nation *would* begin with his children — but there had to be twelve, they had to be united, and they all had to be worthy of becoming part of אֶבֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל, *the [single] rock of Israel*.

Consequently, we can well understand Jacob's alarm at the suggestion that one of his sons might be unworthy. Not only was he a loving father concerned over the shortcoming of *one* beloved child, he feared that the 'twelve-part stone' of Israel might be crumbling, jeopardizing the entire national destiny. This was no parochial fright, and his sons understood him well when he voiced it to them. They responded by reciting the verse of *Shema*, proclaiming their total faith in and allegiance to God. And they concluded by saying:

This was no parochial fright, and his sons understood him well. They responded by reciting the verse of Shema.

בְּשֵׁם שָׁאִין בְּלִבְךָ אֱלֹהֵי אֶחָד, בְּךָ אֵין בְּלִבֵּנוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֶחָד

Just as there is only One [God] in your heart so there is only one in our heart (Pesachim 56a).

Implied in their answer was another facet of oneness. God is One and Israel is one. Our expression of His Oneness is less than complete if Israel is splintered. On Mount Moriah Jacob was shown that the twelve separate parts of his family would have to become one national unit for him to succeed in spawning the nation of Israel. Now, as his corporeal life came to an end, he exhorted his sons to gather together in brotherly unity and support so that he could bless them and reveal the glories of the future. The knowledge of the End of Days was denied them [see comm. for reasons why God would not allow Jacob to reveal it], but his children reassured him that *their* oneness, and thus their ability fully to proclaim *God's* Oneness, was not impaired.

As Jacob's corporeal life came to an end, he exhorted his sons to gather together in brotherly unity.

II. The King as Unifier

על הִסְרַת לִבּוֹ הַקַּפִּידָה תּוֹרָה ... שֶׁלִּבּוֹ הוּא לֵב
כָּל קְהַל יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפִיכָר דְּבָקוֹ הַכְּתוּב בְּתוֹרָה יִתֵּר
מִשְׁאָר הָעָם ...

The Torah objected to [forces that would lead the king's] heart astray. For his heart is the heart of the entire Jewish community, therefore Scripture [commands] him to cleave to the Torah more than it does the rest of the nation (Rambam, Hil. Melachim 3:6).

Conduit from Above

*The two main
unifying factors
are the Temple,
and the nation's
leader.*

Since unity is so essential to Israel's destiny, it is clear that the forces that unify the nation must be cherished and nurtured. In the normal order of things, the two main unifying factors are the Temple, which focuses Israel's devotion upon the site of the *Shechinah* [God's Presence], and the nation's leader — whether he is a judge or prophet — whose primary responsibility it is to guide Israel to the path of God and prevent it from straying.

After Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and assured them that he bore them no ill will, he and Benjamin fell upon one another's necks and wept (45:14). As *Rashi* explains, 'neck' is a metaphor for the Temples. Benjamin wept over the future destruction of the Tabernacle of Shiloh, which would stand in Joseph's territory, and Joseph wept over the destruction of both Temples, parts of which would stand in Benjamin's territory.

For these supreme resting places of *Shechinah*, the Torah uses the metaphor of 'neck,' *Sfas Emes* explains, because the neck serves as the conduit from the brain to the body. Both the Temple and the neck carry messages from above to the national and individual bodies. Just as man's spiritual success depends on how well his mind guides him and controls his animal impulses, so Israel's stature as a nation depends on how well it assimilates the charge of its Heavenly wisdom. The Temples were built by the

The Temples were built by the nation as a whole because they served national functions.

nation as a whole because they served national functions. Although the Temple would stand within its borders, no single tribe could claim a proprietary interest in it because, as the centerpiece of all Israel, it was essential to all the tribes. The Temple was no more the private property of Joseph or Benjamin than the neck is the property of the shoulders that bear it, the hands that protect it or the heart that nourishes it. The Temple is the nation's and the neck is the body's.

The Torah imposed added restrictions on a king to prevent him from being led astray by his ready access to power.

The king, too, as leader and guide of the nation is essential to the unified national well-being. There were kings like David, Solomon, and Hezekiah who drew Israel together and made it great. And there were kings like Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh who splintered it and led to its downfall. The Torah imposed added restrictions on a king to prevent him from being led astray by his ready access to power, temptation, and wealth, and the Torah imposed upon him a special responsibility to study the Torah constantly and to have a Torah scroll accompany him wherever he went.

Judah the Leader

With their prophetic insight, the brothers knew that they must follow Judah; he was their leader.

If the king is so crucial to national unity — if he is the 'heart' of the nation — then the *identity* of the king is equally crucial. From the youth of Jacob's family, it was known among them that Judah was the leader. Jacob was to bless him with sole right to reign (49:8) and no permanent dynasty had standing except the Judean line of David. Only a prophet speaking on behalf of God had the right to appoint a king from another tribe, and even then the kingship could be in his family only temporarily, and he could not be anointed with the holy oil used for Judean kings (*Rambam, Melachim* 1:8-10). Indeed, the hopes and prophecies for the future center around the coming Messiah, a scion of David, the first and quintessential Judean king.

With their prophetic insight, the brothers knew that they must follow Judah; he was their leader, their king, their heart. In contrast to Reuben who is praised as Joseph's savior even though he dared not

suggest that Joseph be returned to Jacob (37:21-22), Judah — who proposed that Joseph be sold rather than killed — is criticized by the Sages. He should have insisted that Joseph be returned to his loving father. Reuben, the firstborn, could not command his brothers' obedience, but Judah the 'king' could. Why didn't he? For this lapse the Sages criticized him (*Bereishis Rabbah* 85:3).

Seeds of Dissidence As discussed in detail in the Overview to *Vayeishev*, the question of kingship was at the crux of the brothers' bitter dispute with Joseph. By his dreams and his behavior, Joseph indicated that he considered himself entitled to reign over his family. As the brothers understood him — erroneously, as we know — Joseph's motives were selfish; if not checked, he would destroy the family's unity and bring Israel's potential to a stillborn end. The brothers feared that they had in their midst another Ishmael or Esau, and it was their duty to keep him from destroying the family [see Overview to *Vayeishev*].

*The prophetically
endowed brothers
perceived in
Joseph the seed of
his descendant
Jeroboam.*

They had another reason to distrust his protestations of innocence. The prophetically endowed brothers perceived in Joseph the seed of his descendant Jeroboam, who led the Ten Tribes to secede from the Davidic monarchy (*I Kings* ch. 11-14; see pp. 1578-79). Jeroboam began as a truly great sage and *tzaddik*, so much so that after he began to sin, God appeared to him, pleading that he repent:

אָמַר לוֹ, חֲזוּר בְּךָ, נִאֲנִי וְאַתָּה וּבֶן יִשְׁי נִטִּיל בְּגֶן
עֲדֵן! אָמַר לוֹ, מִי בְּרָאשׁ? אָמַר לוֹ, בֶּן יִשְׁי בְּרָאשׁ.
אִם בֶּן אֵינֶנִּי רֹצֵחַ.

[God] said to him, 'Repent, then I and you and [David] son of Jesse, will stroll together in the Garden of Eden.'

[Jeroboam] answered Him, 'Who will be in the lead?'

[God] said to him, 'The son of Jesse will be in the lead.'

'If so,' [Jeroboam replied] 'I refuse' (*Sanhedrin* 102a).

Jeroboam's secession had been ordained by God

*The once righteous
Jeroboam could
not resist the
newfound taste of
power.*

through the prophet Achiyah the Shilonite. God ordered Jeroboam to assume the throne because Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor, was unworthy of the mantle of David and Solomon. But God's command to Jeroboam concluded with the admonition that his reign was not to be permanent — *אך לא כל הימים*, but not for all time — only the Davidic dynasty was to be eternal (*1 Kings 11:29-39*). Nevertheless, the once righteous Jeroboam could not resist the newfound taste of power. Once he became king he enjoyed the throne and his perquisites. He realized that as long as his subjects continued to go to the Temple in Jerusalem, the capital of Rehoboam's shrunken kingdom, they would never shake loose the conviction that the Holy City was the true center of the Jewish people.

*Undoubtedly
Joseph protested
that he had no
intention of
usurping what was
rightly Judah's,
but his brothers
would not believe
him.*

Despite the seemingly well-founded suspicion of the brothers, God *had* designated Joseph as the transitional leader of the twelve brothers; he was the 'neck,' the conduit from the Patriarchal Era to the Tribal Era. Although the monarchy would fall to Judah later on, for the present only Joseph could bridge the gap between the Patriarchs and the brothers. Undoubtedly Joseph protested that he had no intention of usurping what was rightly Judah's, but his brothers would not believe him.

Even twenty-two years later when they were tormented and accused by a hard-hearted 'Egyptian viceroy,' and they attributed their travail to their treatment of Joseph, they did not retract their earlier judgment that he must be removed from the family's midst through death or servitude. They recognized in their travail the Divine hand of punishment for their ill treatment of Joseph, but they acknowledged only the sin of hardhearted lack of compassion when he begged for mercy: 'Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we paid no heed' (*42:21*).

At this point the question becomes difficult beyond belief: the brothers were wise and righteous people; if they could realize that they were being

If they could realize that they were being punished for what they did to Joseph, why couldn't they realize that they had misjudged his intentions?

punished for what they did to Joseph, why couldn't they realize that they had misjudged his intentions? Why did they not recognize the true Joseph even when they saw themselves being punished for what they had done to him?

Harav Gedaliah Schorr finds the answer suggested subtly in the narrative of the brothers' growing antagonism toward him. When they saw Jacob's partiality toward Joseph, they hated him; when he first began to dream of mastery over them, their hatred increased (37:4,5,8). As he continued to dream, the Torah no longer speaks of hatred; it says they were *jealous* of him (37:11). *R' Bachya, Alshich, and Or HaChaim* explain that they gradually perceived that his dreams were not the product of ambitious fantasy, but prophetic indications that he would indeed surpass and wield authority over them. Knowing that this was so, they should have come to terms with Joseph's spiritual majesty — but jealousy prevented them from doing so. Had they remained objective they would have realized that he had no base, selfish designs on anyone, but even a tinge of jealousy — and such great people could not have felt more than a tinge — warps the judgment of the most august and righteous. It affected their judgment enough so that they saw in Joseph the worst excesses of Jeroboam, and did not consider that Joseph's true character was better reflected by such descendants as Joshua. Joseph should no more be seen as an earlier Jeroboam than Judah should be seen as an earlier King Manasseh the Davidic king whose idolatrous excess led to the destruction of the First Temple.

They should have come to terms with Joseph's spiritual majesty — but jealousy prevented them from doing so.

One on Behalf of Many

This jealousy may well have had a more far-reaching effect than anyone could have realized.

This jealousy may well have had a more far-reaching effect than anyone could have realized. Although God had decreed upon Abraham's descendants a four-hundred year period that would include three conditions: alien-status, servitude, and suffering (15:13), it was not known at the time how these years would be reckoned and how many years each of the three conditions would exist (see comm. to 15:13 and *ArtScroll Elias Haggadah* pp. 95-97). Certainly, not

every member of the Jewish people need suffer all the pangs of exile equally. In Egypt the Levites were not enslaved, but they were included in the national exile suffered with such intensity by their brethren. As the current exile plays itself out in modern times, we see clearly that not all Jewish communities fare equally. Somehow, however, in the Divine scales all Jewish fortunes and ordeals have their place in God's total plan. *Rashi* to 15:13 tells us that the count of four hundred years began with the birth of Isaac; even *one* man, apparently, can act out the travail decreed upon an entire people — if he represents the entire people.

The four hundred years began with the birth of Isaac; even one man, apparently, can act out the travail decreed upon an entire people — if he represents the entire people.

The Sages teach that Jacob felt entitled to live out his life in tranquility after his return to *Eretz Yisrael* from Charan (see *Rashi* and ArtScroll comm. to 37:1). *Pri Tzaddik* maintains that Jacob's desire was based on a conviction that his multiple ordeals of the previous twenty-two years had been of sufficient intensity to comply with the conditions of servitude and affliction foretold to Abraham. When he could no longer endure Laban's suspicions and presumptuous attempts to dominate the founding family of Israel, Jacob lashed out with a brief, but eloquent, recitation of the conditions under which he had labored for him (31:36-42). His tale could well qualify as one of 'servitude and affliction' and Jacob considered that he had fulfilled those parts of the four-hundred-year decree. If so, he reasoned, he could ask to live in tranquility from then on. Similarly, we find commentators who hold that the sojourn in Egypt was shortened from 400 years to 210 because the Egyptians imposed as much hardship in a relatively short time as had been ordained for the full 400 year period. God reckoned otherwise, of course. But the reckoning of a Jacob cannot be dismissed as frivolous. Undoubtedly his ordeal *did* weigh in God's scales.

Jacob lashed out with a brief, but eloquent, recitation of the conditions under which he had labored.

Joseph, too, spent years in Egyptian exile and slavery; those years, too, could have been sufficient to defray some of the suffering.

Joseph, too, spent years in Egyptian exile and slavery. Had his brothers accepted him as their leader, those years, too, could have been sufficient to defray some of the suffering decreed upon the family

*But jealousy
displaced unity, so
Joseph suffered as
an individual.*

because a king, like a Patriarch, is the heart and embodiment of his people. Had they not been blinded by a trace of jealousy, they would have acknowledged him as their head – their temporary king – and his agony could have represented them all. But jealousy displaced unity, so Joseph suffered as an individual, not as the representative of the entire nation. It was not until almost nine years after Joseph became viceroy of Egypt and provider for the world that his brothers were forced to bend their knees to him in fulfillment of the dreams they had once scorned.

III. Uses of Diversity

*From
Master to
King*

Different approaches and strong differences of opinion among people seeking the same goal are not only unsurprising, they are part of the order of creation. The Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah* 31a) explains the bases on which the Sages selected the various daily psalms sung in the Levite Temple service and in our liturgy. For Monday they chose Psalm 48, a composition of the sons of Korach:

בְּשֵׁנִי מַה הָיוּ אוֹמְרִים: דָּרוֹל ה' וּמִהֶלֶל מְאֹד ...
עַל שֵׁם שְׁחִילָק מַעֲשָׂיו וּמְלֶכֶת עֲלֵיהֶם
Which [psalm] did they say on the second
day of the week? 'Great is HASHEM and
much praised ... [in the city of our God,
Mount of His Holiness]' (Psalm 48),
because [on the second day of creation] He
separated His creations and reigned over
them (*Rosh Hashanah* 31a).

Rashi there explains simply that on the second day God spread out the רָקִיעַ, firmament, to separate the lower from the higher waters (*Genesis* 1:7). At that time He was likened to an earthly king in that He ascended to reign over His newly recognizable Heavenly sphere, just as His human counterpart would one day reign in Jerusalem.

*He ascended to
reign over His
newly
recognizable
Heavenly sphere,
just as His human
counterpart would
one day reign in
Jerusalem.*

R' Tzadok HaKohen (*Resisei Laylah* ch. 47) explains in far more detail. The Talmud uses two terms

to express God's mastery over creation. In speaking of the first day, before the upper and lower spheres were separated from one another, the Talmud calls God a שליט, *Ruler* or *Master*. Only after the separation, on the second day, is He called מֶלֶךְ, *King*. What is the difference between the two terms and why does one better describe God on the first day and the other on the second day?

Someone can be a 'master' in the privacy of his home, to be a king involves having a kingdom with all its trappings.

As the Sages use these words, the difference between the terms is not in the degree of dominion they imply, but in the way it is exercised. Someone can be a 'master' in the privacy of his home, as long as there is no one to oppose him and no conflicting people to reconcile. The Hebrew word מֶלֶךְ, *king*, on the other hand, implies more than mere domination. Almost by definition, to be a king involves having a kingdom with all its trappings of local governments, armies and police, relations with other powers, and countless citizens, each insisting — vocally or inwardly — on his needs and rights. In the famous saying of *Kad HaKemach*, אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּלֹא עַם, *there is no king without a nation*. In Aramaic, the word מֶלֶךְ means *counsel* or *advice* (*Daniel* 4:24), and it is no coincidence that the words for king and counsel are almost identical. To exercise the art of statecraft, a king must know how to reconcile conflicting interests and disharmonious ideas. For him to survive and to make his reign successful, he must be able to maneuver the many people with whom he must deal.

On the second day, God separated the heavenly from the earthly. That act of separation set in motion the infinite distinctions of the future.

On the first day of creation, God was a שליט, *Master*, for different levels of intelligence and spiritual greatness did not yet exist. But on the second day, God separated the heavenly from the earthly. That act of separation set in motion the infinite distinctions of the future, for by that act of dividing the waters into two levels of holiness, God showed that He wanted His universe to contain different kinds of beings. Just as there would be angels and people, sacred and profane, spiritual and material, there would be people with infinitely varying combinations of ability and ideas. They would see, understand, and react to things differently. This

is healthy for it is God's glory that diverse people serve him in a variety of ways, each in his own mode — as long as they function within the guidelines of the Torah — just as the celestial and terrestrial waters of primeval creation were both legitimate expressions of God's will.

God is a 'King,' for
He creates
conditions that
make it possible
for all things to
serve him in their
diversity.

Over such a universe, God is a 'King,' for He creates conditions that make it possible for all things to serve him in their diversity. Or, as the Chofetz Chaim put it to Reb Archik, during their meeting on that Sabbath in Russia, there are many paths to the Tree of Life, and all lead to the same goal even though they start from different points of the circle's periphery.

From Diversity to Strife

But by introducing diversity, God also introduced the possibility of acrimonious dispute when people devise points of view in order to further their own selfish ends. When differing parties search for the truth and disagree violently over how to come by or how to recognize it, the disputants are deserving of honor and, indeed, despite their conflicting views, all may well have perceived a measure of truth, though from different perspectives.

Of such disputes as those of Beis Hillel and Beis Shammai or Rava and Abaye, who disagree dozens of times in the Mishnah and Gemara, the Sages say *אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים*, both this view and that view are the words of the living God (*Eruvin* 13b; *Gittin* 6b).

But of such a dispute as that of Korach against Moses, there is no such praise, only contempt. Korach spoke in valid terms; he insisted upon the holiness of all Jews — and, indeed, every Jew stood at Sinai, heard the word of God, descended from the Patriarchs, witnessed daily miracles, absorbed an enormous degree of holiness. But Korach's argument stemmed not from love of Israel but from love of *Korach*. Had he sincerely sought ways to intensify the nation's service of God, Moses would have debated him and been able to convince him that the *Kehunah Gedolah* [High Priesthood] was not a

Korach's argument
stemmed not from
love of Israel but
from love of
Korach.

plaything that could be made available to anyone who lusted after moments of religious ecstasy. Indeed, when Korach first broached his complaint, Moses attempted to answer and dissuade him. Only when he recognized Korach's insincerity did he dismiss him contemptuously and pray for God's miraculous intervention [see R' Hirsch to Numbers 16:1-11].

Because Korach's sons were sincere, they were not so blinded by selfish motives that they could not see the truth when it stared them in the face.

Korach's sons, however, survived. When they joined their father in arguing for the holiness of the people, their words were not an eloquent disguise for hatred, jealousy, and ambition, they sincerely accepted the argument that all Jews were equally holy and Moses and Aaron were unjustly keeping glory and power. Because Korach's sons were sincere, they repented and withdrew when they saw that God was intervening on the side of Moses. They were not so blinded by selfish motives that they could not see the truth when it stared them in the face.

Therefore the psalm of the second day, fittingly, was one composed by the sons of Korach. The Sages chose wisely. On the day when diversity was created, we sing a hymn composed by those who proved that diversity is truly a virtue if it derives from a sincere search for truth and a desire to serve God according to one's ability to discern how best to do it. Others had searched sincerely, to be sure, but none had been more sorely challenged than Korach's sons — who followed a potentially great father when he seemed to be right, and left him when he was proven wrong.

Instead of accepting Joseph they conspired against him. Like Korach's sons, however, Joseph's brothers drew back from the brink.

The dispute between Joseph and his brothers is another case in point. It should never have occurred. Instead the relationship within the family should have been one of twelve brothers branching out within the Patriarchal heritage to beat twelve different paths to the same Tree of Life. God chose Joseph, an aristocrat of personal merit, to lead them so that their diverse marches would complement, not clash with, one another. But instead of respect the brothers felt jealousy, and instead of accepting Joseph they conspired against him.

Like Korach's sons, however, Joseph's brothers

drew back from the brink. When he revealed himself to them in Egypt, they recognized their error and accepted him as the premier among them. Not that they suddenly surrendered their separate modes of Divine service. To do so would have been as great a mistake, perhaps, as a continued denial of Joseph's superiority, for each was required to serve God according to the unique potential with which he had been endowed. Jacob's and Moses' blessings proved that, if any proof was necessary.

What the brothers did not do was demonstrate that their essence had remained pure and righteous. They had erred, but not become corrupt.

What the brothers *did* do was demonstrate that their essence had remained pure and righteous. They had erred, but not become corrupt; they had come to hate the ambition and danger they perceived in Joseph, but not the human being. With the error recognized and the perception corrected, the brotherly feelings took control and Jacob's family became what it had been intended to be when twelve different stones united.

IV. Judah's Triumph

Healing the Spirit

There were two majestic, royal figures among the brothers: Joseph and Judah.

Another element was necessary. There were two majestic, royal figures among the brothers: Joseph and Judah. Both were kingly leaders and the ancestors of kings, and each embodied an essential characteristic of the Jewish people. Simultaneously, however, they represented a cleavage that could cause inestimable damage to the people. In broad historical terms, this danger would seem to have been starkest during the period of the first Temple when Jeroboam's secession caused a permanent split in the nation and led to the eventual exile into oblivion of the Ten Tribes. It should not be forgotten, however, that this split first occurred in Jacob's lifetime when the brothers rallied to Judah's leadership and repulsed Joseph.

The split had taken place when the brothers' rejected Joseph's dreams and his claim to leadership — even his claim to brotherhood. The rift endured for twenty-two years during which the family of Israel was in spiritual limbo, as Jacob received no prophetic

*Before the tribes
could coalesce
again, their leaders
had to approach
one another and
melt the icy barrier
of suspicion.*

vision and the Torah did not refer to him by his exalted name Israel. Before the tribes could coalesce again, their leaders had to approach one another and melt the icy barrier of suspicion. As we shall see, the reunion of Joseph and Judah brought about the redemption of their family from the exile of antagonism and isolation and paved the way for the growth of Israel into a great and mighty nation.

*The current exile
was caused by
baseless hatred.
Clearly, Joseph,
too, was the victim
of such hatred.*

Not only that, but the Midrash also implies that the redemption from the current, last exile is foreshadowed in the Egyptian experience. Joseph's personal exile from his family is likened to the national history of the last nineteen centuries: if the renewed love of those brothers is duplicated by their modern-day descendants, our redemption will come, as did theirs. Nor is this surprising. The Sages teach that the current exile was caused by *חַמַּדְתָּ הָאֵת*, *baseless hatred*. Clearly Joseph, too, was the victim of such hatred, and the entire family of Israel suffered, too. Their ordeal was ended thanks to a reconciliation, as ours would be if its cause were similarly removed.

*Judah had been
speechless and
resigned; suddenly
he became
belligerent and
argumentative.
What had
happened?*

When Benjamin was 'exposed' as the thief who stole Joseph's silver goblet, the brothers were at a complete loss for words. They resigned themselves to whatever fate the viceroy's sense of justice or mercy would decree. Judah said despairingly, "What can we say to my lord? How can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has uncovered the sin of your servants. Here we are; we are ready to be slaves to my lord ..." (44:16). Yet only two verses later, at the beginning of *Vayigash*, we find the same Judah approaching Joseph to argue against Joseph's even more lenient judgment that no one except for the 'thief' need be enslaved. Judah had been speechless and resigned; suddenly he became belligerent and argumentative. What had happened?

Two things.

Judah's Approach *Pri Tzaddik*, citing R' Menachem Azariah of Fano, explains that Judah's appeal to Joseph was in reality a prayer for God's help. Only a Divine punishment could have heaped such harshness against them, so

only God's help could spare them. Judah's words were directed to Joseph, but in his heart he was speaking to God. [This concept of inner prayer is discussed in the Overview to the ArtScroll Siddur.]

In addition to his prayer, Judah undertook to penetrate to the heart of the implacable viceroy.

In addition to his prayer, Judah undertook to penetrate to the heart of the implacable viceroy. The Torah devotes fully seventeen verses to Judah's speech, and, in the Torah's terms, this is an exceptionally lengthy amount of space. Even with the Midrashic expositions, what he said may not strike us as being especially new or compelling. Whether or not Judah knew how to reach Joseph's inner feelings is beyond dispute — he succeeded. We all know from personal experience that sound arguments will not necessarily convince someone who, like Joseph, wishes *not* to be convinced. Even when persuasion seems to be effective, more often than not the listener will be hearing our words as *he* wishes to hear them, not as we wish them to be heard. Nevertheless, though all the odds were against him, Judah penetrated. He succeeded. And the Sages are lavish in their praise of his feat.

Though all the odds were against him, Judah penetrated. He succeeded.

The Zohar and Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 93:4) interpret *וַיִּגֶשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה* And Judah approached him (44:18), to mean that Judah approached Joseph's innermost depths; the word *אֵלָיו* implies the most intimate sort of association (*D'rashos HaRan, Matnos Kehunah*). The Zohar writes:

תקרובתא דעלמא בעלמא, לאתאחדא דא בדא, למיהוי כולא חד, בגין דיהודה איהו מלך ויוסף מלך אתקריבו דא בדא ואתאחדו דא בדא ... בגין דקורבא דלהון דאתקריבו כחדא גרם כמה טבין לעלמא גרם שלמא לכולהו שבטין, גרם שלמא כינייהו גרם דאתקיים רוחא דיליה, כד"א ותחי רוח יעקב אביהם

[The approach of Judah to Joseph was like] the approach of one world to another, uniting one with the other so that all would become like one. Because Judah who was king and Joseph, a king, came close to one another ... As a result of their closeness, for they came together as one, many

benefits were caused for the world: it caused peace for all of the tribes and peace among [the brothers], and it caused the [prophetic] spirit [of Jacob] to be reestablished, as it says, then the spirit of their father Jacob was revived (45:27).

In describing Judah's successful attempt to influence Joseph, the Midrash (ibid.) likens him to someone who came across a well of clear, cool water, but had no way to draw the water up. Then a wise man came along. He tied one rope to another until he had made a rope long enough to lower a bucket into the well — and then the delicious water became accessible to everyone. In a similar vein, the Midrash cites *Proverbs* (20:5): מִים עֲמֻקִּים עֵצָה בְּלֵב אִישׁ וְאִישׁ תְּבוּנָה יִרְלָנָה, *Counsel is like deep waters in a man's heart, but an understanding man can draw it up.* Buried in Joseph's heart was a plan to conceal his identity until the appropriate moment when he would tell them that he was their brother — but Judah tied together argument, narrative, and appeal until he drew the secret from Joseph, and then the refreshing news that not only had Joseph been found but that he was still *their brother* burst forth to refresh the entire family.

Counsel is like deep waters in a man's heart, but an understanding man can draw it up.

Regal Judah It was a confrontation that ended with all the brothers acknowledging that Joseph was their 'king,' at least for that period of Jewish history — but how magnificently regal Judah proved himself to be in those tense moments! As noted above, the special grace of a king — as opposed to a שָׂרִיט, *master* — is that he can coordinate the behavior of so many different people to achieve a harmony between them; and the very word מֶלֶךְ [king] is related to the Aramaic word [מֶלֶךְ] for עֵצָה, *counsel*. How deep are the pristine waters of counsel that are buried deep down in the human psyche! *God created man upright* [i.e. simple, honest, and upright], *but they sought many intrigues*, says *Koheles* (7:29). Man too often deceives himself and builds dream castles of perverted logic, but God did not create him that way.

How deep are the pristine waters of counsel that are buried deep down in the human psyche!

*Within every man
is a pool of clear,
refreshing
honesty, although
sometimes it seems
to be hopelessly
beyond reach.*

Deep down within every man is a pool of clear, refreshing honesty, although sometimes it seems to be hopelessly beyond reach. Then, sometimes, a Judah comes along — an איש תבונה, *man of understanding* — and finds ways to bring it to the surface.

This Judah did to Joseph, exercising the wisdom and tact of the most profound king. The Torah implies unmistakably that Joseph did not wish to reveal his identity as yet. As *Ramban* explains (see comm.), Joseph considered it his obligation to bring about the fulfillment of his dreams; they were a prophecy and he was the prophet to whom they were addressed. As such, he was charged with doing everything necessary to bring his entire family — including Jacob — to Egypt to bow to him. This was one reason why he continued his harsh demeanor for so long and why he had Benjamin brought to Egypt. Judah succeeded so well in breaking down Joseph's resistance that *וְלֹא יָכַל יוֹסֵף לְהִתְאַפֵּק*, *Joseph could not restrain himself* (45:1) — *Joseph wanted to restrain himself, but he could not. Judah had stripped away his harsh exterior and exposed him as a loving brother and son.*

*Joseph wanted to
restrain himself,
but he could not.
Judah had stripped
away his harsh
exterior.*

V. Plower and Harvester

וַיֵּגַשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה: הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נָאם ה' וְנִגַּשׁ
חֹרֶשׁ בְּקָצֶר. חֹרֶשׁ זֶה יְהוּדָה, בְּקָצֶר זֶה יוֹסֵף.
*Judah approached him: Behold days are
coming — the words of HASHEM — when
the plower will approach the harvester
(Amos 9:13). The 'plower' is Judah. The
'harvester' is Joseph (Bereishis Rabbah
93:5).*

Two Ways to Sanctify **T**he verse selected by the Midrash describes the future redemption. After a long and discouraging litany of Israel's shortcomings and its agonizing descent into the throes of exile, Amos proclaimed that redemption would come and there would be such prosperity that by the time one year's harvest was over it would be time for the next year's plowing. The joining together of harvest and plowing would

The Midrash describes the meeting of the two brotherly 'kings,' likening Judah to the plower and Joseph to the harvester.

be a symbol of joy and deliverance, and it is in the same terms that the Midrash describes the meeting of the two brotherly 'kings,' likening Judah to the plower and Joseph to the harvester. Why? If we can understand this, we will have come a long way in understanding the destiny and goals of Israel.

יוסף שקדש שם שמים בסתר וְכָה וְהוֹסִיפוּ לוֹ
אוֹת אֶחָת מִשְׁמוֹ שֶׁל הַקַּב"ה. יְהוּדָה שֶׁקֵּדֵשׁ שֵׁם
שָׁמַיִם בְּפִרְהֶסְיָא וְכָה וְנִקְרָא כָּלוּ עַל שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל
הַקַּב"ה.

Joseph, who sanctified God's Name in privacy, merited that one letter of the Name of the Holy One, Blessed is He, would be added to his name. Judah, who sanctified God's Name publicly, merited that he would be called entirely by the Name of the Holy One, Blessed is He (Sotah 36b).

Though he sanctified the Name by his steadfastness and courage, he did it in privacy, not making an impact on broad masses.

Joseph was sorely tempted by the seductive wife of Potiphar, his master, but despite her near success, Joseph remained strong and spurned her (see ch. 39 and Overview to *Vayeishev*). In recognition of his merit, the letter ה from God's Four-Letter Name was added to Joseph's name, as we find in *Psalms* 81:6 that that he is called Yehoseph [יְהוֹסֵף]. Though he sanctified the Name by his steadfastness and courage, he did it in privacy, not making an impact on broad masses of people, so he was rewarded with only one letter of the Divine Name; it was inserted into his name in a hardly noticeable manner, and only one time in Scripture is it found.

Harav Gedaliah Schorr notes that the name Yehoseph, which already had the letters י and ה, thus contained three letters of the Name: י, ה, ו. The last ה of the Four-Letter Name is lacking, quite appropriately, because, in Kabbalistic terms, that letter alludes to the attribute of מְלָכוּת, God's *Kingship*, the attribute that signifies *public* awareness of His power, just as a human king's authority is acknowledged throughout his realm. Joseph did not bring God's power to public awareness, so the final letter of the Name could not be awarded to him.

Judah's
characteristic was
different. He
sanctified God's
Name publicly.

Judah's characteristic was different. He sanctified God's Name publicly, the Talmud explains, when Nachshon ben Aminadav, the leader of Judah, set an example for the entire Jewish nation by being the first to plunge into the Sea of Reeds. When Israel found itself pinned against the sea by Pharaoh's pursuing army, the Jews, understandably, were afraid. If they advanced they would drown, if they turned back they would face the full armed might of Egypt. The people were gripped by indecision, but Nachshon walked directly into the water and kept going until it nearly covered him — then the sea split. Nachshon of Judah was instrumental in one of history's greatest sanctifications of God's Name. Because God was so exalted by a member of Judah, all four letters of the Name are found in Yehudah [יהודה], with only the letter ד inserted in the middle.

Spiritual Heritage

When he was
born, his mother,
Leah, felt a special
surge of gratitude
to God.

The matter of Judah's name is instructive, for the Talmud explains the presence of four of its letters by referring to an event that occurred more than 250 years after he was born. Furthermore, the Torah gives a different reason for his name. When he was born, his mother, Leah, felt a special surge of gratitude to God. Jacob's family knew that he was destined to have twelve sons; since he would have four wives, each of them could be expected to bear three sons. When Leah had her fourth, she exulted: הַפֶּעַם אוֹדָה אֶת ה' עַל כֵּן קָרָאתִי שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה, 'This time, let me gratefully praise HASHEM.' Therefore she named him Judah (29:35; see comm. and footnote). [The Hebrew name Yehudah is related to הוֹדָא, *praiseful thanks*.] Having a fourth son meant that she had been granted a greater than expected share in the building of the Jewish people and she used her baby's name as a vehicle to express her thanks.

If so, why does the Talmud say that Judah bears God's Name because of the example his descendant set at the sea?

The principle illustrated by this incident is applicable to many of the lessons the Sages teach us about Scriptural and post-Scriptural events. Often

Often we find that characteristics of a nation or ruler are attributed to its ancestor.

Did every Roman soldier, or even his commander, know the story of Esau and Jacob? Surely the Sages meant no such thing.

Some characteristics are hereditary while others are not; some spiritual traits remain with a nation.

we find that characteristics of a nation or ruler are attributed to its ancestor. The Syrian-Greeks who attempted to impose their will upon Israel at the time of Chanukah are said to be carrying on, though in a perverse way, the heritage of their ancestor Yapheth [see Overviews to *Noach* and *Chanukah*]. The Roman Empire, which descended from Esau-Edom, is seen by the Sages as carrying on its ancestor's hatred for Israel. Must we assume, however, that the Syrian officer who set up a Greek gymnasium and idols in the area of the Temple was aware of the heritage of Yapheth — or that he even knew he was Yapheth's descendant? Did every Roman soldier, or even his commander, know the story of Esau and Jacob? Surely the Sages meant no such thing.

Harav Schorr explains that the Sages, who received the God-given tradition of Scriptural interpretation, taught us that certain characteristics are endemic to a people, rather than merely products of a changeable environment or temporary conditions. For example, a blind or deaf couple will give birth to children who can see and hear. An amputee or someone born without a limb will give birth to healthy children. This proves that the blindness, deafness, or limblessness of parents is not a genetic condition. But parents *will* transfer their color and other racial characteristics to their children.

Obviously, some characteristics are hereditary while others are not. Similarly, some spiritual traits, the Sages teach, remain with a nation. Not all the nations descended from Yapheth were equal heirs of his love of beauty and culture, but Yavan, the ancestor of Greece, was, and this legacy showed itself in Greece and in the Syrian-Greek's insistence on replacing the life of Torah with the "torah" of Greece. Rome inherited Esau's hatred of Jacob and became the nemesis of Israel. Similarly, Jacob's blessings of his sons revealed what characteristics would be innate in them. We cannot take it upon ourselves to say that every person mentioned in the Torah would pass on his nature to his descendants a thousand years into the future; but the Sages knew when

this was the case and they revealed this knowledge when they considered it appropriate. In a sense, this is similar to contemporary analyses of events based on historical trends and biases of individual nations. For example, a conflict between Russia and China would be explained in terms of ancient antagonisms rather than current conditions alone; or Latin attitudes might be explained in terms of national temperament rather than issues.

When the Sages say that Judah bore God's Name because of Nachshon's act, they are revealing to us that Judah, the person and the tribe, had the mission of sanctifying God's Name in public. Thus, another Jew who sanctified the Name might have done so as an outgrowth of his personal development and greatness, but when Nachshon rose to the occasion he did so as a scion of Judah.

Judah's Essence

That declaration of Leah expressed Judah's essence — 'I have taken more than my share.'

Leah only expressed gratitude, but the newborn Judah was the very essence of ascribing everything to God's will.

What is the essence of Judah, the inner source of his exalted mission? That we can see from the story of his birth. Leah named him as a symbol of her gratitude. As *Rashi* (29:35) puts it, she said נָטַלְתִּי יוֹתֵר מִחֶלְקִי מִצֵּתָהּ יֵשׁ לִי לְהוֹדוֹת, *Since I have taken more than my share, it is incumbent upon me to give grateful praise.* As *Chiddushei HaRim* so beautifully put it, that declaration of Leah expressed Judah's essence — 'I have taken more than my share.' Judah would be numerous, powerful, prestigious, regal, wealthy. Judah would have a Nachshon, a David, a Solomon, a Hezekiah; Judah would have a Messiah and bring about the final redemption of all mankind. Nevertheless, Judah would always say, 'I have taken more than my share.' He would never ascribe his greatness to himself, nor would he insist on the prerogatives that might be due him. Judah, the man and the tribe, had one goal in his life: to sanctify God's Name. His very birth caused an expression of overpowering gratitude based on Leah's feeling that she had received more than she deserved. But let us go a layer deeper. Leah only *expressed* gratitude, but the newborn Judah was the *cause* of her realization — he was the very essence of ascribing everything to

God's will, God's generosity, God's mercy.

It was not enough for Judah *privately* to acknowledge that everything came from God. His mission was to be king — and a monarch must proclaim and infiltrate his beliefs and principles throughout the realm, he must inculcate different kinds of people with them in order to create unity within diversity. Nachshon's act was the most public sanctification of the Name that had taken place up to that point, but even there Judah had shown the way. His moment came after Tamar proved that he — Judah — was the father of her unborn twins (38:6-26). It is interesting to note that Judah's test was not whether or not he would live with the woman who, unknown to him, was really Tamar; that he *had* to do. She awaited him at a crossroads and tried to tempt him, but:

Rabbi Yochanan said, Judah sought to pass by Tamar. The Holy One, Blessed is He, dispatched the angel of lust to waylay him. The angel said to Judah, 'Where are you going? [If you pass this woman by] from where will kings arise, from where will great men arise?' Then he [Judah] turned to her by the way — he was coerced, against his good sense (Bereishis Rabbah 85:8).

Unlike Joseph whose test was whether he could resist his master's wife, there was no question that Judah was required to marry Tamar.

Unlike Joseph whose test was whether he could resist the blandishments of his master's wife, there was no question that Judah was required to marry Tamar. Because he would not have done it on his own, an angel was dispatched to remove his resolve and force him to act. Obviously then, he was not expected to ignore Tamar — what then was his test?

Judah's Challenge

When Tamar was being taken to her public execution as penalty for her presumed 'adultery,' she presented proof that no adultery had taken place — that the man was Judah himself. Picture the scene. She had been adjudged in the court established by Shem. Among the judges were Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. Multitudes came to see the judgment carried

*Why hadn't she
told him the truth
privately, before
the trial and the
death penalty?*

out upon the 'immoral' woman who dared besmirch the name of Abraham's sacred family. *And there she confronted Judah!* Why hadn't she told him the truth privately, before the trial and the death penalty? No one knew, perhaps not even Judah, that an angel had intervened — was it fair to humiliate him so, *now*, in so large a forum? Couldn't Judah find some way to save her life without acknowledging his guilt? Surely, some pretext could have been found to show last minute mercy. Surely Judah could have confided in Isaac and Jacob, who would have saved Tamar without disgracing him.

Judah recognized that his moment of challenge had come and, presumably, that Tamar's earlier reticence was a necessary step in constructing the test that he must now confront. Remember — Judah's primary mission was not to do good and refrain from sin. His mission was to proclaim that every achievement was God's gift and that God's Name must be sanctified publicly whatever the cost.

*Many a kingdom
has been lost,
many rivers of
blood have been
spilled for the sake
of honor. Not
Judah.*

Nachshon was ready to display his faith even if it might cost him his life — Judah went further. He admitted the truth even though it could cost him his dignity, his self-respect, his reputation. Many a kingdom has been lost, many rivers of blood have been spilled for the sake of honor. Not Judah. Judah stood up before everyone and let it be known that a Jew will not permit a wrong to be done or a person to be hurt because of his error or to salvage his dignity. Yes — he could have found a way to save her without disgracing himself, but that would have forfeited the opportunity to sanctify God's Name publicly. Instead, Judah made the admission that proved him worthy of leadership in God's eyes, if not in the eyes of the stunned onlookers of Canaan.

The strength of Judah lay in his readiness to be a willing receptacle of God's talent, blessing, and responsibility while ascribing nothing to himself. His very name indicates this quality. The Hebrew spelling of Judah's name, יהודה, contains the sacred four-letter name of God — plus one more letter, a ד, *dalet*. The word דל, *dal*, in Hebrew means a pauper. Judah

Judah has within
himself the
majesty of his
Creator, in his own
eyes, however,
Judah remains לל,
a pauper.

has within himself the majesty of his Creator; his kingship is no less than the Kingship, in a mortal guise, of God Himself, — in his own eyes, however, Judah remains לל, a pauper. No matter how exalted his position, whatever he has is an undeserved gift of God.

The future
Mashiach will
finally fulfill the
purpose of
creation, but he is a
pauper riding the
humblest of
domestic beasts.

David, first of the Judean kings and model for all his successors, embodies the same concept in his name. It begins with *dalet* and ends with *dalet*. For all his grandeur and achievement, for all the love his Maker bore for him and the holiness that made even the blood of his war victims seem like holy offerings before the altar of God, David, from beginning to end, considered himself a pauper, an impoverished mortal who carried only the gifts of God, but nothing of his own. The future *Mashiach* is described by Zechariah as עֲנִי וְרוֹכֵב עַל חֲמֹר, a poor man riding a donkey. He will finally fulfill the purpose of creation by bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to earth and by crowning God as King of all mankind — but he is a pauper riding the humblest of domestic beasts of burden.

Such kings represent the final stage of revelation. They are themselves but an embodiment of God's will on earth.

When Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she gave special thanks because God had given her more than her share. That is why Jews are called *Yehudim* (implying that they are descended from Judah) no matter what tribe they belong to. Even Mordechai, a Benjaminite, is referred to in *Megillas Esther* as *Mordechai haYehudi*. We are *Yehudim* because we always thank God for giving us more than our share, more than we deserve. The Jew is ever conscious of the graciousness and mercy of God. To him, health, prosperity — life itself — are never his by right; he thanks God for everything, for it is all an undeserved gift (*Chidushei HaRim* in *Sefer haZechus*; see Overview to *Ruth*).

The prophet alludes to Judah with the term חורש, plower. In discussing the forbidden labors of Sabbath, the Talmud defines the purpose of plowing as

Judah's mission was a public one: to soften the hearts of his fellow Jews so that they would be receptive to the word of God.

לִרְכֹךְ אֶרֶץ, to soften the earth so that it is suited to receive seeds. Judah's mission was a public one: to soften the hearts of his fellow Jews so that they would be receptive to the word of God and the teachings of the Torah. Judah and his tribe 'plowed' through their personal example of negating themselves, ascribing nothing to themselves, working for their people, and sanctifying their Maker.

Some of R' Bachya's comments on Jacob's blessings of Judah (49:12) are illustrative of this concept:

— He notes that the letter *zayin* is not found in the five verses of the blessing. The word זַיִן [*zayin*] means *armament*, and the prime expression of Judah's blessing is that God's Presence be so obviously with him that he would require no army to conquer his foes. In the time of Hezekiah, for example, prayer and repentance were sufficient, for God responded by causing the massive, terrifying army of Sennacherib to die in their camp overnight. Can there be a better example of a *plower* making the world receptive to God's word and able to see His hand?

— Aside from the four letters of the Name, Judah's name contains a ד, which has the numerical value of four. This is a reminder that he was the fourth son of Leah — and his birth provoked her to exclaim with joy and gratitude, 'I have taken more than my share!'

Abundant wine, an allusion to Kiddush, our testimony that God created heaven and earth in six days and rested on the seventh.

— Judah was blessed with abundant wine, an allusion to the *Kiddush* of Sabbath. *Kiddush* is our testimony that God created heaven and earth in six days and rested on the seventh. Its recitation is an extension of Judah's mission that God's greatness be proclaimed and His Name sanctified.

David's humiliation with BathSheba was caused from Above so that he would become the model of repentance for every Jew ever since.

Judah's quintessential heir was David who, despite his personal greatness and achievement, proclaimed אֲנִי חוֹלְעָה וְלֹא אִישׁ, *I am but a worm, not a man*, and who became Israel's teacher *par excellence* in the art of self-effacing prayer and repentance. Just as Judah was forced into his predicament with Tamar so that he would proclaim publicly that she was right and he was wrong, so David's humiliation with BathSheba was caused from Above so that

he would repent for the rest of his life and thereby become the model of repentance for every Jew ever since (*Avodah Zarah* 5b).

Joseph's Challenge Joseph's role was different. He was exemplified by one who harvests, discarding everything except what is absolutely useful. As the bridge between the Patriarchs and his brothers, Joseph stood on a higher level of perception and service. His was the intimate communion with God, the higher wisdom that would not permit sin. Therefore his challenge was different from Judah's. When he was tempted, he would have been accounted a failure had he succumbed and then tried to sanctify the Name by a public acknowledgment. Joseph *was* more so he had to do more.

As described at length in the Overview to *Vayeishev*, Joseph was the son who was most like Jacob and was therefore his spiritual heir. His greatness was such that only the great Jacob could fully perceive it, and it was for this reason that he was charged with the leadership of the family, to be the surrogate Jacob, so to speak. The Jewish nation was moving from the level of Patriarchs — triumvirate whose every act and gesture was a guidepost for the future history of Israel — to the august but lower level of the tribal ancestors.

*Joseph was the son
who was most like
Jacob and was
therefore his
spiritual heir.*

Despite the greatness of Jacob's twelve sons, they were not Abrahams, Isaacs, nor Jacobs, and they needed someone who could 'cushion the descent,' as it were, from the lofty spiritual world of the Patriarchs. Joseph was the one; he was on a plane between that of his father and that of his brothers and it was for that reason that he could give birth to tribal ancestors, a privilege denied any of his brothers. That his sons Ephraim and Manasseh were named to the status of tribes (48:5) is no mean tribute to Joseph. However one understands Jacob's motives in so honoring Ephraim and Manasseh, one fact must remain clear — the Three Patriarchs and the Twelve Tribal Ancestors represent two distinct levels in the strata of Jewish history. Just as no one could aspire to join the triumvirate of the Patriarchs, no

If only a Jacob
could be the father
of the tribal
ancestors, then
only someone
approaching him
could be the father
of two who were
the equal of
Jacob's sons.

one of a later generation could climb to parity with the twelve brothers — except for Ephraim and Manasseh. If only a Jacob could be the father of the tribal ancestors, then only someone approaching him could be the father of two who were the equal of Jacob's sons. Indeed, the Talmudic Sages teach that Joseph was worthy to be the father of twelve sons who would be the equals of the tribal ancestors (*Sotah* 36b).

In this sense, the Kabbalists refer to Joseph as the possessor of חֵכְמָה עֲלִיָּא, *higher wisdom*, while Judah, the other leader of the brothers, was the possessor of חֵכְמָה תַּחְתָּא, *lower wisdom*. Joseph, the monarch with heavenly wisdom, sanctifies God's Name in privacy, for he dares not permit sin to tarnish him. God's higher wisdom does not consort with sin, even to serve as the vehicle for repentance and self-negation.

Man's strongest
drive is also his
most sublime for it
is the source of life
itself.

This wisdom represents God, the Source of life, and because it does, Joseph's challenge took the form of sexual passion. Man's strongest drive is also his most sublime for it is the source of life itself. God commands Israel to affix the seal of בְּרִית קָדֶשׁ, *His holy covenant*, on the organ that produces life, thereby signifying that the Jew harnesses his most animal-like passions to the service of God, to produce the sort of life *He* desires. Joseph epitomized this goal, and for that reason he was uniquely honored with the title Joseph the *Tzaddik*. That title was given him not merely for maintaining his saintliness in Egypt — though that was no small achievement — but for the manner in which he did so.

The harvester
discards all the
unavoidable trivia
of life and cuts
through to the
essence and
purpose of
existence.

The person who exemplifies such wisdom and behavior is fittingly called קוֹצֵר, *the harvester*, because he discards all the unavoidable trivia of life on earth and cuts through to the essence and purpose of existence.

Two Redemptions

As we have seen above, the Sages liken the climactic meeting between Joseph and Judah, the harvester and the plower, to Amos' prophecy regarding the End of Days. There are times when Israel must look

to the plower and there are times when it must look to the harvester, times when its primary duty is to proclaim God's Name to the multitudes and times when it must draw itself in and sanctify his Name within the privacy of its own four cubits and its most intimate behavior.

The redemption of Jacob's family from inner turmoil and its loss of the spirit of prophecy began when Judah approached the innermost recesses of Joseph's being and wrenched from him the admission that he was Joseph and had remained their brother throughout the ordeal that had required him to display rage rather than love. It was a confrontation that began in anger and ended in embrace — and only then could the process go forward that would unite Jacob's family and prepare it for nationhood and the acceptance of the Torah. So it will be on that long awaited day when Israel's inner wounds and schisms will heal and — in the prophecy so aptly chosen for the *Haftarah* of *Vayigash* — *Ephraim shall not envy Judah and Judah shall not oppress Ephraim* (*Isaiah* 11:13). When the plower and the harvester approach one another with good will and understanding, when they recognize that Israel at peace with itself has much to learn from each of its members, then Redemption will be upon us.

*When the plower
and the harvester
approach one
another with good
will and
understanding,
then Redemption
will be upon us.*

Travail and Birth

Earlier we noted that the Sages assigned Psalm 48 as the song of Monday because the second day of creation was the time when God put into motion the diversity that could lead to healthy tension or destructive discord. Very fittingly, the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 93:2) applies part of the psalm to the confrontation of Judah and Joseph. The psalm says (vs. 5-7): *For behold the kings* [i.e., Judah and Joseph] *assembled, they raged together* [i.e., Judah and Joseph were enraged at each other]. *They* [i.e., the other brothers] *saw and were forthwith astounded, they were terrified and fled in haste. Trembling gripped them there ...*

The Midrash expounds that the other ten brothers said:

מְלָכִים מְרִינִים אֱלֹו עִם אֱלֹו, אָנוּ מָה אֵיכָפֶת לָנוּ.
יֵאֵי לְמֶלֶךְ מְדִין עִם מֶלֶךְ.

Kings [i.e., Judah and Joseph] are contesting with one another, what affair is it of ours? It is proper for a king to contest with a king.

The psalm's eloquent depiction of commoners gripped with terror helps us visualize the electric tension that gripped the palace as Judah advanced.

The psalm's eloquent depiction of commoners gripped with terror as their monarchs rage at one another helps us visualize the electric tension that gripped the palace as Judah advanced upon the facade of hostility and majesty that Joseph had thrown up to shield his identity from his brothers. But the Midrash does not tell us how the same psalm foreshadows the happy outcome. *Harav Schorr* was fond of finding a postscript to the Midrash in an anecdote told about Rabbi Akiva Eiger, of eighteenth and nineteenth century Posen.

At a wedding in the company of distinguished rabbis, Rabbi Eiger and the others became embroiled in a Talmudic discussion, grew animated and heated; this led to raised voices and high emotions. Such is the nature of Talmudic disputation, which the Sages praise saying that when scholars seek the truth and argue in its pursuit the end result of their clash is love and companionship [אֶת זֶהָב בְּטוֹפָה]. But the laymen, unacquainted with the world of Talmudic debate, stood aghast as they watched the great rabbis 'shouting disrespectfully at one another.' Rabbi Eiger noticed their discomfort and lightheartedly explained with the words of Psalm 48:

The laymen, unacquainted with the world of Talmudic debate, stood aghast as they watched the great rabbis shouting disrespectfully.

'*The kings assembled and rage together* — for, as the Talmud explains, מֵאֵן מְלָכִי? רַבָּנָן, *who are the true kings?* — *the Torah scholars.* But they, the onlookers, are astounded and terrified at this spectacle. They flee from what they think is a lack of courtesy and they tremble in the presence of such conduct. But they fail to realize that the outcome of the noisy discussion is, as the verse concludes, חִיל בְּיֹלְדָה, *convulsions like a woman in birth travail.*

'Do not be put off by the shouting and convulsions,' Rabbi Eiger told the people. 'It is like a mother in labor. The result of her shocking agony and

The struggles and debates of scholars create new life in the form of a better understanding of God's Torah.

frightful cries of pain is a new life. Similarly, the struggles and debates of scholars create new life in the form of a better understanding of God's Torah.'

A plower and a harvester came together, joy and prophecy returned to Jacob.

Harav Schorr would say that Rabbi Akiva Eiger's witty soothing of perplexed townspeople should be understood as if it were one of his Talmudic glosses. He is giving us the conclusion that the Midrash implies, perhaps, but does not say: the brothers withdrew in fear and perplexity as the two kings, Judah and Joseph, engaged in a tournament that seemed as if it could destroy them both. What was the result? It ended like the labor pains of a mother — with the joy of renewed life. A plower and a harvester came together, joy and prophecy returned to Jacob, and a journey began that would end at Sinai and Jerusalem.

VI. Survival in Exile

*Jacob's
Trepidation*

True the brothers had told him the good news that his favorite son had not changed, but Jacob had to wonder.

We can only imagine the foreboding that mingled with Jacob's joy as he heard that Joseph was still alive and — more important — that his favorite son had remained the same Joseph even though he had risen to power in the midst of a country notorious for its debauchery [see comm. to 45:26-27]. True the brothers had told him the good news that his favorite son had not changed, but Jacob had to wonder. Joseph's role was to embody *חֵכְמָה עֲלֵאָה*, *higher wisdom*, to resist temptation, to maintain his bond with the source of life, and to be but a step below the Patriarchs. In all these roles, he had been superior to his brothers, but if they had not perceived his stature when he lived in Canaan and studied at Jacob's feet, how could they be expected to perceive it through the royal robes of Egypt? Just as they had been blinded before by jealousy, so they might be blinded now by the happiness of their discovery. People have a way of seeing what they want to, and the brothers could be pardoned if they wanted to see a Joseph unaffected by the wrong they had done him. But most important, Joseph's spiritual

stature was such that even in the best of circumstances, only a Jacob was qualified to be its true judge.

Let us imagine that after a disappearance of over twenty years, the son of a great tzaddik has become the prime minister of the Soviet Union.

Let us imagine that after a disappearance of over twenty years, the son of a great *tzaddik* is discovered — he has become the prime minister of the Soviet Union. Would not his father's happiness be dampened by fears that the son's scholarship, righteousness, and fear of God could not have remained untainted by his environment and position? The standards at the peak of government, especially in an atheistic or idolatrous country are not the same as those of the academy.

It would not be unreasonable to expect that a son torn from his loving father would make a special effort not to forget his father's last words.

Nevertheless, there was enough meaningful comfort in the brothers' news to rejuvenate Jacob's spirits sufficiently to bring a return of his prophetic spirit even before he saw Joseph with his own eyes (45:27). As *Rashi* notes, Joseph had transmitted through his brothers the last Torah teaching he had learned from Jacob, as proof that he had retained the knowledge that set him above the rest of the family. Surely there is more to this than appears on the surface. It would not be unreasonable to expect that a son torn from his loving father would make a special effort not to forget his father's last words. Many a child who drifted far from his parents' way of life can repeat their last words verbatim, especially if the circumstances of their separation, like Joseph's from Jacob, were so sudden and tragic.

What could he learn from Eber that Isaac could not teach him?

Harav Yaakov Kaminetzky שליט"א notes the apparent strangeness of Jacob's decision to spend fourteen years at the Academy of Shem and Eber before going on to Laban (see comm. to 26:10). His parents had sent him to Paddan Aram to escape Esau's wrath and seek a mate, but, at the age of sixty-three, he made a lengthy detour for the sole purpose of studying Torah. Already when he was a child the Torah describes Jacob as a studious boy who spent his time in the halls of Torah (25:27). All his life he had had Isaac as a teacher — what could he learn from Eber that Isaac could not teach him?

Torah of Sh'lah and Alshich explain that apparently Jacob's Exile

scholarship needed an embellishment beyond what he had received from Isaac, one that he could not be without if he were to survive his exile with Laban. In the home of Isaac, Jacob had studied in the holiest possible atmosphere, the sort of rarefied environment that could hardly be compromised by the deleterious influences of exile.

True, all of Isaac's life was included in the four hundred years of exile foretold to Abraham, but that was true only as concerned the attitude displayed toward him by his neighbors: sometimes it was hostile, more often it consisted of bare tolerance with a touch of disdain, but it fell short of the respectful reverence shown Abraham throughout his tenure in Canaan. So the exile endured by Isaac was an external thing — expressed more by an occasional sneer or contention over wells, but it never included hostility of a dangerous sort or the plight of being a total foreigner in a strange land. Most important, it never affected the quality of his life. In and around Isaac's home there was never an exile: his tent was a sanctuary, his study the chariot of the *Shechinah*, his family a miniature Temple, insulated and secure from the idolatrous, immoral surroundings.

Jacob, however, was called upon to endure exile — not figurative nor symbolic — stark, real, hostile, dangerous exile in a foreign land, under the sway of a conniving, swindling Laban, who did not hesitate to voice barely veiled threats when his ire was aroused (31:28) or to state flatly that only at his pleasure could Jacob marry and raise a family — and expect to keep it (29:25-28; 31:43). Jacob would spend over twenty years of his life with the knowledge that his brutish, violent brother had vowed to kill him, and when he was finally returning to *Eretz Yisrael* with his large family and huge flocks of livestock and servants — Jacob would learn that Esau was marching at the head of a sizable army to exact his vengeance.

That was exile! An exile not defined by subtleties, like Isaac's, but one that the most unsophisticated observer could recognize only too well. To face an

The exile endured by Isaac was an external thing — expressed by an occasional sneer or contention over wells.

That was exile! An exile not defined by subtleties, like Isaac's, but one that the most unsophisticated observer could recognize only too well.

From Isaac he
learned the Torah
of Eretz Yisrael;
from Eber he
learned the Torah
of exile.

exile in such inhospitable surroundings and among such unsavory people, Jacob needed preparations of a sort that Isaac and Rebecca could not afford. Life among saints does not prepare one to cope with barbarians. Jacob had grown up in the holiness of *Eretz Yisrael* with a father who had never left the Holy Land — the Land Jacob was now forced to leave, completely on his own. For such an ordeal Jacob needed new spiritual underpinnings. For that he went to the Academy of Eber, there to study Torah for fourteen uninterrupted years in preparation for an exile harsher than any Isaac ever knew. From Isaac he learned the Torah of *Eretz Yisrael*; from Eber he learned the Torah of exile.

That Jacob taught the Torah to Joseph, we know; the Sages tell us that Joseph was his father's premier student and this was one of the reasons Jacob loved him so (see comm. to 37:3). In describing what Jacob had taught Joseph, the Sages say: *כָּל הַלְכוֹת שֶׁ שֶׁמֶם וְעֵבֶר לִיעֲקֹב מִסְּרָן לוֹ*, *all the laws that [the Academy of] Shem and Eber transmitted to Jacob, he transmitted to [Joseph] (Bereishis Rabbah 84:8; Rashi to 37:3)*. In one of those prophetic insights by which God sprinkled meaning into every act of the Patriarchs, He influenced Jacob to teach the Torah of Shem and Eber to Joseph. Jacob did not know that Joseph would need the Torah of exile even more than he had, but when the seventeen-year old leader of Israel's next epoch was dispatched to his own twenty-two year exile, the 'harvester' had amassed the stories of spiritual food he would need during the agonizing years while he prepared for the task of nourishing a famine-stricken world.

When Joseph sent back word that he was still alive, he knew that Jacob would want to know what *kind* of Joseph was still alive — had Joseph's *soul* survived with his body? So Joseph's message was a recitation of the last law Jacob had taught him. Perhaps even the choice of that law was Divinely inspired. The subject was *עֲגֻלָּה עֲרוּקָה* (*Deuteronomy 21:1-9*), the ritual symbolizing that the elders of a city bear responsibility to provide lodging, food, and

*The teachings of
Eber had
succeeded in
preparing a second
Jew for the rigors
of exile.*

safe passage for wayfarers. By signaling his brothers to tell Jacob that he still remembered, Joseph was declaring, in effect, that the teachings of Eber had succeeded in preparing a second Jew for the rigors of exile, and that Jacob had not fallen short in carrying out his duty to Joseph, his son who had been a lonely wayfarer for so long.

True, Jacob could not be satisfied until he saw Joseph with his own eyes, but that message went far enough toward removing his anxiety that he could again receive prophecy after a twenty-two year lapse.

*When
Doubts
Disappear*

The episode of Joseph's revelation to his brothers contains another portent for the future Redemption. Familiarity has dulled our perception of the anguish Joseph's brothers felt before Joseph's uttered those electrifying words: *אני יוסף, I am Joseph.*

The brothers had seen Jacob's unrelieved suffering for twenty-two years. They were responsible for Joseph's disappearance — perhaps death — and now they were being punished for it. They had taken Benjamin, too, from his father — would Jacob survive another loss? Even if Judah were to take Benjamin's place, they would lose their leader. How could they, the heirs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob become the playthings of a paranoid, sadistic viceroy? Was Benjamin truly a thief? Jacob had been told by God that the destiny of Israel depended on twelve righteous tribal ancestors, and now it was all crumbling. So many thoughts tortured them. So many questions without answers.

*How could they
become the
playthings of a
paranoid, sadistic
viceroy?*

*Then the Egyptian
viceroy said 'I am
Joseph' — and the
questions
disappeared!*

Then the Egyptian viceroy said 'I am Joseph' — and the questions disappeared! In a flash of lightning, God's plan took shape before their eyes and twenty-two years of trauma became the framework upon which nationhood, growth, and redemption were being built. There was no stolen cup, no lost brother, no crumbled destiny, no fratricide. There was unity, recognition that Joseph had been right all along, and there was still time for them to accept him in the role in which God had cast him.

More important, Harvester and Plower had met,

had joined, had forged a brotherhood of redemption. It was true — the destiny of Israel depended on twelve sons united in an impregnable rock, and now the pieces had come together again. It is doubtful whether the spiritual integrity of Israel could have survived an Egyptian exile if the tribal ancestors had remained fractious — even under the best conditions of unity, their descendants slid to almost the lowest level of contamination before they were finally redeemed — but now they *were* united in both mission and love. So it was that **וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת יַעֲקֹב וְאֶבְיָהֶם**, *and the Children of Israel transported Jacob their father* (46:5); Jacob could go into yet another exile without foreboding because his children, *all* his children, shared in carrying the burden of Jewish destiny.

Someday, perhaps even today, God will reveal Himself and His plan, as Joseph did then.

After nineteen centuries of exile, Israel has questions at least as perplexing as those that tormented the brothers. But someday, perhaps even today, *God* will reveal Himself and His plan, as Joseph did then. He will interrupt our agonies with an electrifying call of His own:

**רְאוּ עַתָּה בִּי אֲנִי הוּא וְאֵין אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי אֲנִי
אֲמִית וְאֶחָדָה מִחַצְתִּי וְאֲנִי אֶרְפָּא**
*See now — it is I, I am He! — and there is
no god with me. I kill and give life. I
wound and I heal (Deuteronomy 32:39).*

*Can this be?
Surely. It
happened in Egypt
— when a plow
broke through the
icy reserve of a
harvester, the
edifice of doubt
crumbled like a
house of cards.*

At the climactic moment that God reveals Himself in the history of man, every incomprehensible happening will take on meaning, every unanswerable question will become part of the answer. Can this be? Surely. It happened in Egypt — when a plow broke through the icy reserve of a harvester, the edifice of doubt crumbled like a house of cards and the temple of future greatness rose in its place. May the prophecy of Amos be fulfilled again, speedily in our days, so that doubt disappear when a Ruler can repress His mercy no longer and He proclaims: 'See now, it is I, I am He! ... I have wounded and I will heal!'

סדר ויגש

Sidrah Vayigash

ויגש אליו יהודה ויאמר בי אדני ידבר-
 נא עבדך דבר באוני אדני ואליחור אפק
 יט בעבדך כי כמוך כפרעה: אדני שאל
 מדיח-יט

SIDRAH VAYIGASH

18. Judah Intercedes.

[As we learned in the conclusion of the last Sidrah, Benjamin had been caught with the viceroy's goblet, and Joseph ruled that Benjamin would have to remain in Egypt as a slave while the other brothers must return to their father. The brothers were dumbfounded. Only Judah risked his life to intercede.

[His speech was eloquent. As the exegetes remark, it was controlled yet emotion-filled; respectful yet firm and daring. He petitioned without humiliating himself. He could not protest the fairness of the verdict, because the goblet was found in Benjamin's sack! Instead he offered himself as slave — unknowingly to the very brother whom he had once sold as slave to Egypt...]

ויגש אליו יהודה — Then [lit. and] Judah approached [to] him.

— At first they had all been standing at a respectful distance from the viceroy; now Judah stepped forward. It was not his intent to plead for justice, but to appeal to the viceroy's compassion (*Malbim*).

The Midrash records three interpretations of the verb גש, approach. It can often connote drawing near for the purpose of engaging in battle as in I Samuel 10:13. Another view maintains that it implies a conciliatory approach as in Joshua 14:6. The Rabbis maintain that it implies that coming near for prayer; see I Kings 18:36 [comp Rashi to 18:23].

R' Elazar combines the three views and interprets that Judah approached

Joseph with all of the above in mind: He was prepared for battle [see below for Midrashic interpretation cited by Rashi]; for conciliation [as is indicated by the text of his plea]; and for prayer [i.e. that Judah would transfer his claim to God and beg for Heavenly justice (*Tanchuma*)].

אני — If you please, my lord.

The translation follows Rashi to 43:20, but Ramban differs. See comm. there.

Sechel Tov interprets: בי, me: Benjamin's fate affects me, primarily, my lord, since I guaranteed his safety to my father; therefore, let your servant speak a word, etc.

ויברך אדני עבדך דבר באוני אדני — May your servant speak a word in my lord's ears.

I.e. may my words penetrate into your ears [that is, may my request convince you] (*Rashi*).

Rashi rejects the literal interpretation that Judah whispered in Joseph's ear, since it would be highly improper for a commoner to dare speak to a monarch that way. Furthermore the plural ears rules out literal whispering — which would be done into one ear. Moreover, as noted in 42:23, they always spoke through an interpreter, so Judah could not have wanted to whisper directly to the viceroy, since he had every reason to think Joseph did not understand Hebrew (*Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*; *Sifsei Chachomim*).

Targum Yonasan renders the idiom: In the hearing of my lord.

— You emphasized [v. 17] that it would be 'sacrilegious' for you to let even the guilty suffer. Therefore, let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears to apprise you of the harm that will come to our innocent father if you keep Benjamin as a slave [i.e. that he will die of grief] (*Sforno*).

¹⁸ Then Judah approached him and said: "If you please, my lord, may your servant speak a word in my lord's ears and let not your anger flare up at your servant — For you are like Pharaoh. ¹⁹ My lord

Specifically, the 'word' Judah requested was the plea (v. 33) that Joseph substitute him for his brother Benjamin; everything else Judah said was to introduce that conciliatory appeal (*Ramban*).

Permit me to speak but one thing to my lord: I do not make a legal argument for exoneration; it is mercy that I beseech of you. Therefore let it be in my lord's ears — that is, directed personally to you and not to your servants, since they lack the authority to exonerate (*Abarbanel*; *Malbim*).

וְאֵל יְהוָה אָפֶךְ בְּעֵצְרְךָ — And let not your anger flare up at your servant.

'We derive from this that he spoke harshly to him' (*Rashi*).

That is, Judah knew that in the course of his emotional appeal he would inevitably speak harshly, and he wanted Joseph to anticipate it and not be angry. Had Judah not expected to speak antagonistically, there would have been no need for him to mention this (*Mizrachi*; *Be'er Yitzchak*).

R' Avraham ben HaRambam maintains that Judah was afraid that he might infuriate Joseph by his temerity in making a lengthy address to the monarch in his time of anger; he therefore begged his indulgence in advance. *Ramban* similarly writes that Judah was asking the viceroy not to be angry at him for speaking up.

Sforno: Do not be angry when I imply that you forced us into this position.

[The expression חָרִין אָף, *flaring anger*, referring to outwardly displayed vexation is discussed in the *comm.* to 30:2.]

כִּי כְמוֹת פַּרְעֹה — For you are like Pharaoh [lit. for like you like Pharaoh].

That is, I consider you as important as the King. This is the plain sense of the phrase. The Midrash [which, as noted above, perceives that Judah spoke harshly and was prepared even for battle] interprets the inner connotation of the phrase to imply: You will be smitten with leprosy for detaining Benjamin, just as Pharaoh was smitten for detaining my great-grandmother, Sarah, for only one night [above 12:17]. Another [Midrashic] interpretation: You are like Pharaoh in that neither of you keeps promises — is this what you call 'setting eyes on him'? [v. 21 below; see *comm.* there and *Ramban* below].^[1] Another [Midrashic] interpretation: You shall become like Pharaoh — if you provoke me I will slay both of you [therefore I beseech you not to provoke me by flaring up your anger at me (*Midrash HaGadol*)] (*Rashi*).

1. *Ramban* does not agree that Judah could have reasonably argued, "Is this the 'setting your eyes upon him' to which you referred when you said, 'and I will set my eye on him' [v. 21]?" To the contrary, Joseph displayed unusual courtesy to Benjamin when he first met him: he blessed him [43:29], made a banquet, and gave him presents! [*ibid.* v. 34]. Obviously, when a monarch commands that a person be brought before him he does not imply immunity from the consequences of crimes he may commit, especially when the crime is the theft of the monarch's own goblet! What else should Joseph have done under the circumstances?

Accordingly *Ramban* suggests that Judah's appeal was directed not to *reason*, but to Joseph's *compassion* as a man who claimed that he feared God [42:18], and who demonstrated his piety by consoling them for having caused them trouble [43:23]. The thrust of Judah's appeal, then, was that they brought Benjamin to Egypt only at Joseph's insistence, and that

את-עבדיו לאמר היש-לכם אב או-אח:
 ונאמר אל-אדני יש-לנו אב וקן וילד
 וקנים קטן ואחיו מת ויותר הוא לבדו

ויגש
 מדכ

Following *Rashi's* plain interpretation that Judah meant 'because I consider you as important as Pharaoh,' this phrase modifies the foregoing and the verse means: 'Let not your anger flare up at your servant — even though my anxiety may prompt me to speak to you harshly — because, indeed, I consider you as important as Pharaoh, and my impertinence is motivated not by disrespect or rebelliousness, but by the bitterness of my heart' (*Maskil l'David*).

The double use of the comparative prefix [כן like] preceding both pronouns indicates that the two are completely similar — You are like Pharaoh and Pharaoh is like you (*Ibn Ezra*). [See comm. to 18:25 כְּצָרִיק כְּרָשֻׁעַ and 13:10 ה' כֵּן בְּאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.]

Rashi mentions only the comparison of Joseph to Pharaoh since that is the essence of the context (*Mizrachi*).

Ramban interprets: I stand speaking before you with the same trepidation I would feel were I speaking to Pharaoh.

Furthermore, as *Ramban* writes in v. 19: Since you are comparable to the monarch, it is befitting that you stand by your word to treat Benjamin well. It was only on account of you and under great duress that we brought him to you [see footnote].

For you are like Pharaoh — and who then am I to address you? (*Ralbag*).

19-34. Variations in the Recapitulation.

[Judah skillfully proceeds to recapitulate the dialogues and interrogations between the viceroy and the

brothers. Although there are minor variances between Judah's recapitulation and the Torah's earlier accounts of the conversations — and the commentators perceive nuances in many of the variances — it is clear that Judah could not be misrepresenting the truth to Joseph, who was a participant in those conversations. Clearly, Judah artfully passed over whatever minor details might irritate Joseph as well as any that would not support his petition that he and not Benjamin be held behind. Furthermore, as *Radak* often notes (see also *Ramban* to 41:3 and 17): 'In reported speech, a person always varies his wording — adding or subtracting as he sees fit, while preserving the essential content ... these are characteristic of any repetition or paraphrase; the words change but not the content.' *Ramban*, too, notes that the Torah characteristically varies the report of an event according to the situation, so that the complete facts must be ascertained by combining the differing accounts.

Judah undoubtedly perceived a sinister conspiracy in the matter of the goblet — although he could not fathom its purpose — so he knew it would be futile to argue for Benjamin's innocence. Instead, as *Ramban* writes, Judah's appeal was designed to evoke Joseph's compassion as a self-proclaimed God-fearing man [42:18]. Accordingly, at great personal risk, he presented an emotional argument, that was compelled by his pledge and love of his father: If only one of us is to remain as a slave let it be me, so that our aged and anxious father may again see his beloved youngest son. I, who guaranteed Benjamin's safety, could not

Jacob consented with the greatest reluctance, only because they were in dire need of food. Therefore, Judah implied, it behooved Joseph to be compassionate toward the aged father, and to substitute Judah for Benjamin.

In defense of the Rabbinic interpretation of "is this what you meant by I will set my eyes upon him?," *Ramban* comments Judah knew that the goblet affair was a hoax orchestrated by

had asked his servants as follows: 'Have you a father or brother?'

²⁰ And we said to my lord, 'We have an old father and a young child of his old age; his brother is dead,

return home without him, 'lest I witness the ill fate that would overtake my father.'

19. אֲדֹנִי שָׁאַל אֶת־עֲבָדָיו לֵאמֹר הֲיֵשׁ אָב אוֹ אָח — *My lord had asked his servants as follows [lit. saying], 'Have you a father or brother?'*

— You sought a pretext against us from the very beginning. What need was there to ask us all these questions? Were we seeking your daughter in marriage or were you seeking our sister [that such intimate interrogation would be justified]? (*Rashi*).

[The implication is that although every purchaser of provisions was screened to determine how large his ration should be, none was interrogated so intimately by Joseph as they were.]

Although 42:13 indicates that they had volunteered this information, 43:7 implies clearly that they mentioned Benjamin only in response to Joseph's pressing question. *Ramban* [43:7] explains that Joseph had interrogated them and they gave the information about their father and brother only in response to his threatening inquiries. That the Torah did not record this part of the dialogue in chapt. 42 is in keeping with Scriptural style, which is concise in one place and expansive in another.

Oznaim L'Torah conjectures that Joseph had shrewdly avoided family questions at first since he was apprehensive that they might recognize him. But when they voluntarily offered information about the family, saying [42:11] 'All of us — sons of one man are we,' he quite naturally inquired, 'Have you a father or a brother?'

Abarbanel and *Malbim* maintain that

Joseph had not initially asked them about their family. Rather our passage is a rhetorical question: *Had, then, my lord asked his servants whether we have a father or brother?* — No, you did not ask, but [v. 20] we said [voluntarily] to my lord, 'we have an old father and a young child of his old age'. We had no ulterior motive other than to emphasize how much our father frets over him.

20. וְנֹאמַר אֶל־אֲדֹנִי יֵשׁ־לָנוּ אָב זָקֵן וְיֶלֶד זָכוֹן קָטָן — *And we said to my lord, 'We have an old father and a young [lit. little] child of [his] old age.'*

[The intimation was:] Although we resented your inquisitiveness, we concealed nothing from you (*Rashi*).

Judah's emphasis on their old father was intended to stir Joseph's compassion. Since Reuben, the oldest brother, was only forty-five, the viceroy may not have realized that Jacob was so old — 130 years (47:9) — at the time (*Ibn Ezra*).

The implication is that an old father worries more over a child than a young one, and he is especially protective of a child of his old age (*Malbim*).

[The term זָכוֹן has been discussed in the comm. to 37:3.]

וְאָחִיו מֵת — *[And] his brother is dead*

— And this causes his father to be excessively concerned over him (*Malbim*).

Judah spoke an untruth [by stating categorically that Joseph was dead,

Joseph to create a pretext against them. Similarly, the Midrash records [see *Rashi*, next verse] that Judah said, 'Have you interrogated anyone else who came to buy provisions as thoroughly as you interrogated us? Were we asking for your daughter in marriage or were you seeking to marry our sister?' Arguments such as these were suggested in his words.

ויגש כא לאמו ואביו אהבו: ותאמר אל-עבדיך
 מד/כא-כד כב הורדהו אלי ואשימה עיני עליו: ונאמר
 אל-אדני לא-יוכל הנער לעזב את-אביו
 בג ועזב את-אביו ומת: ותאמר אל-עבדיך
 אס-לא ירד אחיכם הקטן אתכם לא
 כד תספון לראות פני: ויהי כי עלינו אל-

rather than אִנּוּ, *he is gone*, as he said in 42:13 because he was afraid that if he said Joseph was alive [or if he left it ambiguous], the viceroy might say, 'Bring him to me!' (*Rashi*).

Judah meant: Since we have not known his whereabouts for so long, we assume he is dead; or: he is dead to us. This is what we meant in saying 'he is gone' [42:13] (*Tzeidah LaDerech; Gur Aryeh*).

[According to the commentators who hold that the brothers did not sell Joseph and that he was taken from the pit without their knowledge, this verse should be understood literally, because the brothers truly thought Joseph had been devoured by wild beasts. (This is clearly not the traditional Rabbinic interpretation; see *comm.* to p. 1650 "Who Sold Joseph?", specifically p. 1653).]

הוא לבדו לאמו – [And] *he alone is left of* [lit. *to*] *his mother*.

That is, he is the only surviving child from that mother (*Rashi*).

And there is no substitute for him (*B'chor Shor*).

Accordingly, his father is even more anxious over him (*Malbim*).

The phraseology 'left to his mother' would imply that his mother Rachel was still alive, which she was not. Therefore, *Rashi* comments that 'to his mother' in this context means 'from/of his mother.' According to *Lekach Tov* the implication of the expression is that only Benjamin was left as a reminder of his dead mother, and whoever saw him exclaimed, "This is Rachel's son!"

ואביו אהבו – *And his father loves him*.

His father loves him the most, and that is why he did not let him accompany us at first – not, as you charged, because he had sent us to spy (*Sforno*).

And his father loves him – because through him our father recalls Rachel whom he loved so dearly (*Pesikta*).

21. ואשימה עיני עליו – *And I will set my eye on him*.

I.e., my 'eye' will be gracious to him (*Targum Yerushalmi*).

– And therefore his father need not be apprehensive about sending him (*Sforno*).

The implication is not, as *Ibn Ezra* would have it, merely 'I will see him,' [to establish that the brothers did not lie in describing their family], but that Joseph would treat him well and be protective of him. (Comp. the same use of this idiom in *Jeremiah* 39:12 where Nebuchadnezzar commanded Nebuzaradan to 'look at' Jeremiah when he took him into custody, meaning that the king wanted his officers to treat Jeremiah well). – 'Therefore,' Judah implied, 'it behooves you to keep your word and allow Benjamin to return to his father, and keep me instead.' Joseph said this in the narrative of the original confrontation; but the

44 he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves
21-23 him.'

²¹ Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, and I will set my eye on him.'

²² We said to my lord, 'The youth cannot leave his father, for should he leave his father he will die.'

²³ But you said to your servants, 'If your youngest brother does not come down with you, you will not see my face again!'

Torah did not record it there; however it is common for Scripture to be brief in one narrative and provide details elsewhere. What Joseph probably said was: 'Do not fear that I have evil intentions regarding your brother, I want only to be convinced of your truthfulness. Bring him to me and I shall keep an eye on him' (Ramban; Malbim; Abarbanel).

[Furthermore, as noted in the Prefatory Comment to v. 19, Judah's references to the earlier dialogues with Joseph had to be accurate, since he was reporting them to Joseph. See *comm.* and footnote to v. 18.]

— Even if Benjamin has committed a crime, you should let him go, since you assured us that you would protect him and it is beneath the dignity of a leader to go back on his word (B'chor Shor).

22. לא יוכל הנער לעזוב את־אביו — The youth cannot leave his father ... For all the reasons stated above (Akeidah).

And furthermore, having been so pampered all his life, the youth would not be able to withstand the rigors of travel (Lekach Tov).

ומת — נעזב את אביו — For should he leave his father [then] he will die.

That is, should he leave his father

we are apprehensive that he — Benjamin — would die on the journey — just as his mother died during a journey (Rashi).

Comp. Midrash HaChofetz cited in *comm.* to 42:4 (p. 1824): 'Jacob reasoned, It may have been decreed that the sons of Rachel should perish on the road. I sent Joseph on a journey and he did not return; the same might happen to Benjamin if I send him, for their mother, too, died on the road.'

Thus, Rashi interprets the subject of וְיָמָת, then 'he' would die, to be Benjamin, who is the subject of the rest of this passage. According to Rashbam, the subject is his father: For should he leave his father then he [his father] would die. Ramban agrees with Rashi that the context of the passage indicates that Benjamin is the subject.

23. אִם־לֹא יָרֵד ... לֹא תִסְפֹּן לְרֹאשׁוֹ פָּנָי — But you said to your servants, 'If your youngest brother does not come down with you, you will not see my face again!'

You paid no attention to our fears, and instead you capriciously demanded that we bring him, notwithstanding our just pleas (Alshich; Sforzo).

... In retrospect, however, was it really so important for us to have brought him here? (B'chor Shor).

ויגש עבדך אבי ונגד-לו את דברי אדני: כה
 מר/בה-כט ויאמר אבינו שבו שברו-לנו מעט-אכל:
 כו ונאמר לא נוכל לרדת אם-יש אחינו
 הקטן אתנו וירדנו כי-לא נוכל לראות
 פני האיש ואתינו הקטן איננו אתנו:
 כז ויאמר עבדך אבי אלינו אתם ידעתם כי
 כח שנים ילדה-לי אשתי: ויצא האחד
 מאתי ואמר אך טרף טרף ולא ראיתיו
 כט ער-הנה: ולקחתם גם-את-זה מעם פני
 וקרהו אסון והורדתם את-שיבתי

24. — ניהי כי עלינו אל-עבדך אבי ...
 And it was, when we went up to
 your servant my father [and] we
 told him my lord's words.

We immediately told our father
 of your insistence that Benjamin
 return with us, but even though it
 meant leaving Simeon in prison he
 would not let Benjamin go with us
 until he was forced to do so by the
 famine [next verse] (Ramban).

[Joseph was criticized by the
 Sages for his disrespect in remain-
 ing silent when his brothers referred
 to his father as *your servant*. In
 punishment for it he died pre-
 maturely. See footnote on p. 1881
 and comm. to 50:2.]

25. — שבו שברו-לנו מעט-אכל. 'Go
 back, buy us some food.'

— Because he realized full well
 the consequence of his request,
 Jacob did not make it until he was
 forced to do so because of the
 severity of the famine (Ramban).

26. — ונאמר לא נוכל לרדת. [Then]
 we said, We cannot go down.

That is, it would be futile
 (Alshich).

— אם יש אחינו הקטן אתנו וירדנו ...
 Only if our youngest brother is

with us, then will we go down, for
 we cannot see the man's face if our
 youngest brother is not with us.

[The nuances of this dialogue
 have been treated in the comm. to
 43:3-5.]

27. Although the pangs of famine
 forced our father to consent that
 Benjamin go with us, he still warned
 us that if we did not bring Benjamin
 back, he would die from grief
 (Sforno v. 24).

[The following passage was not
 recorded in the original account of
 the dialogue, in keeping with
 Ramban's rule that the Torah is
 brief in one place and expansive in
 another, reserving details for
 wherever they would be more pre-
 tent.]

— אתם ידעתם כי שנים ילדה-לי אשתי
 You know that my wife [Rachel]
 bore [to] me two sons ['sons' is not
 in the Hebrew but it is implicit in
 the masculine number שנים, two].

My wife, that is, the only woman
 that I originally wanted as a wife —
 Rachel — bore me but two sons.
 Upon them I bestowed all my love
 — as though they were my only
 children (Ramban).

²⁴ And it was, when we went up to your servant my father we told him my lord's words. ²⁵ And our father said, 'Go back buy us some food,' ²⁶ we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us, then will we go down, for we cannot see the man's face if our youngest brother is not with us.'

²⁷ Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two [sons]. ²⁸ One has left me and I presumed: Alas, he has surely been torn to pieces! for I have not seen him since. ²⁹ So should you take this one, too, from my presence, and disaster befall him, then you will have brought down my hoariness in evil to the grave.'

יָלָדָה לִי, bore to me, i.e. closely resembling me (Or HaAfeilah — Torah Sheleimah 886).

28. וַיֵּצֵא הָאֶחָד מֵאֵתִי — One [lit. the one] has left me [lit. has gone forth from me].

הָאֶחָד, the one, i.e. the more outstanding of the two (Lekach Tov; Haamek Davar).

[From me — i.e. by my command. By associating himself with Joseph's absence, the Patriarch still criticizes himself as if he were responsible for Joseph's disappearance.]

[Furthermore, it was me he left — I alone was affected by his loss. Comp. 42:36 עָלַי הָיָה כָּלָהּ. 'Upon me has it all befallen!']

וְנִאֲמַר אֶךָ טָרָף טָרָף — And I presumed: Alas, he has surely been torn to pieces!

[See 37:33.]

וְלֹא רִאִיתִי עַד-הַנֵּה — For [lit. and] I have not seen him since [lit. until now].

This is the proof that he must have been mangled by wild beasts, for I have never seen him since (Ibn Ezra), and there was no other source

of danger to him but wild beasts (Abarbanel).

[Actually, however, Jacob harbored a suspicion that his sons had slain or sold Joseph. See Rashi and commentators cited in 42:36.]

29. וְלָקַחְתֶּם גַּם-אֶת-זֶה מֵעֵינַי — So [lit. and] should you take this one, too, from my presence [lit. from my face].

I.e., from my protective care (Haamek Davar) ...

וְקָרְהוּ אִסּוּן — And [should] disaster befall him.

— As it did to his brother Joseph, since Benjamin was young and unaccustomed to travel (Ramban).

— A disaster on the way is highly likely since 'the Satan accuses in time of danger.' That is, there is greater danger on a hazardous journey than at home (Rashi; see comm. to 43:4).

The term אִסּוּן [disaster] refers to unnatural or unexpected death, for example by bandits, wild beasts, or change of climate (Ramban; see Kesubos 30a cited in the comm. to 42:4).

וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם אֶת-שִׁיעָרִי בְרָעָה שְׂאֵלָה — Then you will [thereby (Rambam)] have brought down my hoariness

ויגש מדל-לב
 ל ברעה שאלה: ועתה כבאי אל-עברך
 אבי והנער איננו אתנו ונפשו קשורה
 שני לא בנפשו: והיה בראותו בייאין הנער
 נמת והורידו עברך את-שיבת עברך
 לב אבינו ביגון שאלה: כי עברך ערב את-

[i.e., grey hairs] in evil to the grave.

[Since I will be left bereft of all of those I love and I will be, in effect, devoid of all goodness (Maharshal).]

Benjamin is Rachel's only survivor; while he is with me I find consolation through him for the loss of his mother and brother. If he should die it will seem to me as though the three of them died on the same day (Rashi).¹¹

[See comm. to 43:38, and Rashi to 37:35.]

In 42:38, and below v. 31 the expression used is בגון שאלה, in sorrow [lit. grief] to the grave, while here the expression used is ברעה שאלה, in evil to the grave. Yalkut Or HaAfeilah [cited in Torah Sheleimah 8907] suggests that grief refers to This World; evil to the Next World. [The allusion is unclear, however. See footnote.]

ועתה כבאי אל-עברך אבי והנער
 איננו אתנו — And now, if I come to
 your servant my father and the

youth is not with us.

And now — especially now that our father had forewarned us so emphatically that he would not attribute Benjamin's absence to happenstance but would consider it as if we deliberately brought this misfortune upon him (Sforno).

ונפשו קשורה בנפשו — Since his soul is so bound up with his [i.e., Benjamin's] soul!

I.e., his soul is as dear to him as his own [i.e., he loves him as much as himself] (Onkelos).

[This is a subordinate clause bridging this verse and the next.]

[The same phrase is used of the intertwined souls of David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 18:1.]

Moreover, the yearning Jacob would have for Benjamin while he is away would be even greater than when he sees him constantly (Alshich).

— והיה בראותו בייאין הנער נמת 31.

1. Rashi's comment that Benjamin's death would be tantamount to all three having died on the same day is based upon the Midrash. As Jacob mentioned before, his primary wife bore him two sons. When she died he derived some consolation from Joseph — upon whose presumed 'death' Jacob also exclaimed [37:35]: 'For I will go down to the grave mourning for my son!' However, as the Midrash records, Jacob was somewhat consoled by Benjamin for the deaths of Rachel and Joseph. Should Benjamin die, Jacob would be left without any consolation, for he would feel as if all three of them had died on the same day.

Though Jacob did not mention Rachel's death, he alluded to it with the term ברעה שאלה, in evil to the grave, instead of saying בגון שאלה, in grief to the grave, as he did in 42:38 and v. 31 below.

He was implying the dictum that he who lives without a wife is in 'evil', for the Sages [Yevamos 62b] proclaimed [based on Genesis 2:18], "He who has no wife dwells without good" — hence, in evil.

Accordingly, the flow of Jacob's argument, was: I had found consolation over my wife's and son's deaths from her sole survivor, Benjamin. But should he die, I will be devoid of any consolation and in effect, will be going down to my grave in evil, that is, bereft even of my wife (Mizrachi; Gur Aryeh; Tzeidah laDerech).

30 And now, if I come to your servant my father
30-32 and the youth is not with us — since his soul is so
bound up with his soul! — 31 it will happen that when
he sees the youth is missing he will die, and your ser-
vants will have brought down the hoariness of your
servant our father, in sorrow to the grave.

32 For your servant took responsibility for the

It will happen, that when he sees
the youth is missing [and] he will
die.

I.e., the very instant Jacob sees
that Benjamin is not with us
(*Ralbag*)...

He, i.e., our father, will die — of
grief (*Rashi*).¹¹

We will not even have a chance to
explain what happened to Ben-
jamin. The instant he will see that
the youth did not return with us,
Father will fall dead in grief (*Abar-
banel*).

Conceivably, if we would tell Father
that Benjamin stole, he would suppress
his instincts and agree that Benjamin
deserves this punishment, for Father is
righteous and a man of truth. However,
we will not even have the opportunity
of telling him; he will die immediately
(*Dubno Maggid*).

-- The question arises: Benjamin
had ten children at home; why
didn't Judah mention the grief Ben-
jamin's children would experience
at their father's absence?

R' Menachem Mendel of Kotzk
used this as an example of how

parents have more compassion for
their children's misfortunes, than
children for their parents.

והורירו עבדך את־שיבת עבדך אבינו
בגיון שאִלָּה — And your servants
will have brought down the hoari-
ness of your servant our father in
sorrow [lit. grief] to the grave.

— An idiom meaning to cause one
to die of grief (*R' Saadiah Gaon*).

In the literal sense, we refers to
the brothers (*Ramban* v. 32); how-
ever, it is possible that Judah really
meant: And you [Joseph] will there-
by have brought the hoariness of
your servant our father in sorrow to
the grave. Out of respect for the
viceroys, Judah used the euphem-
ism we (*Ramban* v. 19).

32. Judah proceeds to explain why
of all the brothers only he has taken
the initiative to plead Benjamin's
cause ...

כִּי עַבְדְּךָ עָרַב אֶת הַנּוֹעַר מִעַם אָבִי — For
your servant [i.e., I, Judah] took
responsibility for [lit. guaranteed]
the youth from my father.

1. Kabbalistically, there is an interpretation that the one who would die in our passage is Benjamin! Since Jacob will assume that because Benjamin did not return he must have died — and indeed Jacob's words will cause Benjamin to die: the power of the righteous is so great that even their inadvertent statements come true and then your servants will be culpable for this grief caused to our father. [See comm. to 31:32 and the incident recorded in *Kesubos* 62b from the verse *Like an error proceeding from a dictator* (*Eccles. 10:5*)] (*R' Moshe ibn Chabib* cited in *Me'am Loez*).

❧ In a homiletical paraphrase of this verse R' Meir of Prymishlan once remarked:

"How can we have the audacity to one day ascend and stand before our Father in heaven [i.e. after death, when our souls must account for our deeds on earth] at a time when 'the youth is not with me' — when our young people are not walking in their parents' ways; for your servant appointed the youth as the guarantor, that is, we promised at Mt. Sinai that our children will guarantee the eternal observance of the commandments!"

ויגש מד/לג-לד הַנֶּעַר מֵעַם אָבִי לֵאמֹר אִם-לֹא אָבִיאֲנֹו
 לג אֵלָיְךָ וְחֻטְאֹתַי לְאָבִי כָל-הַיָּמִים: וְעַתָּה
 יִשְׁבֶּנָּא עִבְדְּךָ תַּחַת הַנֶּעַר עֶבֶד לְאֲדֹנָי
 לד וְהַנֶּעַר יַעַל עִם-אֲחִיו: כִּי-אֵיךְ אֶעֱלֶה אֶל-
 אָבִי וְהַנֶּעַר אֵינְנֹו אִתִּי פֶן אֲרָאָה בְּרַע
 א אֲשֶׁר יִמְצָא אֶת-אָבִי: וְלֹא-יָכֹל יוֹסֵף מה/א

Should you ask why *I* am speaking and not my brothers, it is because they are less involved; the responsibility for the youth rests with *me* since I have placed myself under a firm bond to be an outcast in both worlds if I fail to bring him home (*Midrash; Rashi*).

Ramban suggests that Judah was emphasizing that even after the food shortage became acute, Jacob was still unwilling to let Benjamin go until Judah took personal responsibility for his safety. This would explain why Judah was so afraid that Jacob would die if Benjamin were detained and also why Judah — who had guaranteed the youth's safety — was ready to offer himself as a slave to save Benjamin.

According to *Sforno*, Judah said this to explain why his father would die as soon as he saw Benjamin did not return with them — without even inquiring after the youth: Since I became the personal guarantor for the youth, if I do not bring him back Father will assume he was surely lost, otherwise, I would surely have brought him back.

Targum Yonasan explains כִּי *as therefore: Therefore*, i.e. because my father was so reluctant to send

the youth, *your servant undertook responsibility for the youth*. I felt I had no alternative but to reassure Jacob and accept full responsibility.

... — וְחֻטְאֵי לֹאבִי כָל-הַיָּמִים Then I will be sinning to my father for all time [lit. all the days].

— Judah said this to impress Joseph with the fact that the oath was not an idle insignificant promise, but one that carried a great imprecation ... The connotation of *all the days* is either all of Jacob's days if Judah would survive him, or all of Judah's days, if Jacob would be the survivor (*R' Shmuel ben Hofni*).

ועַתָּה יִשְׁבֶּנָּא עִבְדְּךָ תַּחַת הַנֶּעַר 33. וְעַתָּה יִשְׁבֶּנָּא עִבְדְּךָ תַּחַת הַנֶּעַר
 — עֶבֶד לְאֲדֹנָי Now, therefore [lit. and now] please let your servant remain instead of the youth as a servant to my lord.¹¹

— I.e., if you will not pardon him (*Radak*).

I am more suited than he for every purpose: in strength, for battle and for personal service (*Rashi*).

Comp. *Tanchuma Yashan*: One who buys a slave and discovers that he is a thief sends him back, yet you would force a thief to be your servant! You must have some sinister

1. Judah's self-sacrifice for Benjamin had significant consequences for the future history of the Jewish people, and Benjamin was to have an opportunity to do the same for Judah. When the Ten Tribes of Israel seceded from the Davidic dynasty, only Benjamin remained loyal to the Judean kingdom. This made it possible for Judah to survive as an independent nation despite its repudiation by the majority of the people (*Yalkut Yehudah*).

44 youth from my father saying, 'If I do not bring him
33-34 back to you then I will be sinning to my father for all time.'

³³ Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the youth as a servant to my lord, and let the youth go up with his brothers. ³⁴ For how can I go up to my father if the youth³³ is not with me lest I see the evil that would befall my father!"

design. If you want him as a personal attendant, I am more skilled than he; if you require him as a fighter, I can fight better than he. Therefore please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the youth.

וְהַנֶּעֶר יֵצֵא עִם אָחָיו — And let the youth go up with his brothers.

Our law says that only if a thief has nothing with which to make restitution shall he be sold as a slave [see Exodus 22:2]; but this one [Benjamin] *does* have enough possessions and *can* make restitution; why, then, do you wish to hold him as a slave? (*Tanchuma*). [The implication is that even according to *your* laws, why would you want a slave whom you indicted as a professional thief — since he obviously did not steal out of need? Therefore, let him make restitution and release him. But if you wish, out of principle, to retain someone as a slave, choose me (*Dubno Maggid*).]

34. כִּי אִיךָ אֶעֱלֶה אֶל־אָבִי וְהַנֶּעֶר אִתִּי — For how can I go up to

my father if the youth is not with me.

I.e., *how* — in the name of compassion — could I do such a thing? Compare Esther's similar outburst [Esth. 8:6] *How can I bear to witness the destruction of my relatives!* (R' Avraham ben HaRambam).

How could I go back to Father under such circumstances? I would rather remain a permanent servant than go up to Father without the youth. Judah mentioned this so the viceroy would not suspect that Judah's offer was a deception, knowing he could more easily escape than Benjamin (*Rambam*).⁽¹⁾

According to Akeidas Yitzchak Judah meant: 'You told us [v. 17] "As for you — go up in peace to your father." But how can I do so, seeing the inconsolable grief it will cause him!'

פֶּן אֶרְאֶה בְּרָע אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצֵא אֶת־אָבִי — Lest I see the evil that would befall my father!

— Since he would constantly weep and mourn for him all day (*Ramban*).

1. Judah's oath to Jacob *If I do not bring him back to you* — [v. 32] — could not be fulfilled if Benjamin returned on his own, but only if Judah would *personally* bring him back. The implication was that even if Benjamin returned without Judah, the dread oath would still be in effect and Judah would be considered as having sinned to his father all the days.

Nevertheless, Judah emphasized that he was ready to sacrifice himself and remain a slave — even though the imprecation of the oath would in any case remain in force. It was as if to say, 'What have I to lose? If I am to face the penalty of the oath in any event, I would rather remain a servant here than to return without Benjamin and — in addition to the oath — face the grief my father would suffer at the loss of Benjamin!' (*Alshich*; *Maasei Haahem*; *Haamek Davar*).

לְהִתְאַפֵּק לְכָל הַנֹּצְצִים עָלָיו וַיִּקְרָא הוֹצִיאוּ כָּל-אִישׁ מֵעָלָי וְלֹא-עָמַד אִישׁ

ויגש
מה/א

XLV

1. Joseph identifies himself.

With Judah's selfless offer of himself as a substitute for Benjamin, Joseph finally had the irrefutable proof of the change in his brothers' old attitude, as exemplified by their filial devotion to Jacob, their love for Benjamin, and their sincere contrition for their crime against Joseph himself. It was to ascertain this that he subjected them to all these tribulations to begin with [see R' Hirsch to 42:7, 9, and 43:16]. Moreover, his brothers had had their share of the expiatory humiliation they deserved. Joseph felt, therefore, that the time of reconciliation had at last arrived (*Akeidah*; *Abarbanel*; R' Hirsch; R' Munk).

וְלֹא יָכַל יוֹסֵף לְהִתְאַפֵּק לְכָל הַנֹּצְצִים
עָלָיו — Now Joseph could not
restrain himself in the presence of
all who attended him.

The flow of this verse is difficult — especially the inclusion of the phrase *in the presence of all who attended him* in this context — and the commentators vary in their interpretations.

According to Rashi the sense is: He could not bear [לְסָבֵל, lit. *suffer; endure*] for the Egyptian bystanders to witness the shame his brothers would feel when he made himself known to them. [The meaning, then, of the verse is: *He could not restrain himself* (to witness their shame) *in the presence of all* (the Egyptians) *who attended him*.]

Levush insists that Rashi is explaining the general context rather than the individual words, because it is clear

from Rashi's interpretation of the word *לְהִתְאַפֵּק* in 43:31 that the word means *fortify* [lit. *strengthen*], in the sense of controlling one's emotions, and not *bear*. In harmony with this interpretation, *Levush* interprets Rashi that Joseph had been fortifying himself all along in the sense that he overcome his emotional inclination to reveal himself — for, had he done so, his brothers would have been humiliated in the face of the Egyptian bystanders. Now, however, that he could no longer control the need to identify himself, he ordered that everyone but his brothers leave his presence.

Ibn Ezra: He could not bear to wait until all the bystanders would leave of their own accord; he ordered that they leave immediately.

Until this point, Joseph conducted himself with great self-control, but now he could no longer do so. Rather than lose his composure in the company of so many Egyptians, he ordered that they leave (*Rashbam*).

[It would appear, according to this view, that Joseph had not planned as yet to divulge his identity, but he could no longer restrain himself.]

Targum Yonasan interprets the object of Joseph's restraint to be his tears: He could no longer restrain his tears despite the importance of not crying in front of all those who stood before him. [*Onkelos* may have interpreted the phrase the same way.]

Ralbag interprets similarly that Joseph was afraid that his welled-up tears [over hearing Judah's repeated description of Jacob's grief (*Radak*)] would burst forth while the Egyptian bystanders were still present, and it is unseemly for a ruler to display strong emotion before his subjects.

¹ Now Joseph could not restrain himself in the presence of all who attended him, so he called out, 'Make everyone withdraw from me!' Thus no one

On two previous occasions, Joseph was able to stifle his tears long enough to leave the room and weep [see 42:24 and 43:30], but now — because of the great throng of people milling about — he could not comfortably make his way to his private chambers. This is implied by the phrase of *all who attended him*. Therefore, unable to restrain himself further because of their presence he ordered them to clear the room (*Abarbanel*).

Ramban suggests that many Egyptians joined in the plea for Benjamin's release since they were deeply stirred by Judah's presentation, and Joseph was not strong enough to resist them all. He therefore ordered, 'Let every stranger leave me and I will converse with them [i.e. the brothers].'

Abarbanel disagrees with the above implication that Joseph's revelation was motivated by outsiders' pleas. *HaKsav V'haKabbalah* defends *Ramban*, noting that Joseph had refrained all along from revealing himself — not maliciously — but only to bring about the fulfillment of the prophetic dreams of his youth [37:6ff; see *comm.* to 42:9]. Up to this point, the dreams had been *partially* fulfilled — only the 'stars' [his brothers] had bowed to him — and it is conceivable that if not for the pleas of the Egyptians, Joseph would have waited still longer, until *all* of his dreams were fulfilled.

According to the *Midrash*, Joseph's inability to restrain himself was not out of compassion, but because Judah threatened to destroy Egypt. See footnote verse 3, s.v. *העור אבי חי*.

The translation of *עליו נצבים*, *standing upon* (i.e. before) him as referring to those who stood before him — in his attendance — follows the context. *Comp. Rashi* to 18:2 that *נצבים לפניו*=*נצבים עליו*, and *ibid.* 18:8 that *עמד על*, *stand upon*, means to *stand in attendance*. *Ramban* interprets similarly.

ליקח את כל-איש מעליו — ויקרא הוציאו כל-איש מעליו. — So [lit.

and] he called out, 'Make everyone withdraw from me!'

He called out angrily [to his son, Manasseh (*Sechel Tov*)], *Make everyone*, except these men, *withdraw from me*, and I will converse with them personally!" In addition to the reason offered by *Rashi* in the beginning of this verse, it may be that Joseph expelled the Egyptians to prevent them from learning that his brothers had sold him. Had the Egyptians known, they might refuse permission to the brothers to settle in Egypt on the ground that they were treacherous people. If they acted that way to their own brother and father, how would they act toward Pharaoh and the Egyptians! Moreover, the Egyptians might, as a result, lose faith even in Joseph (*Ramban*).

Tanchuma Yashan mentions yet another reason why Joseph wanted no outsiders present when he revealed himself to his brothers: The ban his brothers had imposed upon him against revealing what had occurred [see footnote p. 1653] was still in effect, and under its terms he might not disclose it to any outsider. [Presumably once the following dialogue took place and the brothers agreed to reveal Joseph's whereabouts to their father, the ban was *de facto* annulled. See *comm.* to v. 9, below.]

The *Midrash* records that Joseph risked great danger by remaining alone with his brothers. If the brothers, put to shame by his revelation, had attacked him, he would have had no one to defend him. Though aware of this danger, Joseph thought: "It is better that I die than humiliate my brothers in front of the Egyptians!" This is the opinion of R' Chama ben Chanina. But the son of R' Nachman disagrees: "Joseph had no

ויגש מה-ב-ג ב אתו בהתנודע יוסף אל-אחיו: ויתן את-קלו בבכי וישמעו מצרים וישמע בית-ג פרעה: ויאמר יוסף אל-אחיו אני יוסף העור אבי חי ולא יכלו אחיו לענות

reason for fear. He was aware of his brothers' piety and knew they were not murderers."

ולא עמר איש אתו בהתנודע יוסף אל-אחיו — Thus no one [lit. no man] remained [lit. stood] with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

Although the wording of the command would imply that Joseph ordered his attendants to expel every outsider, and he did not specifically order his attendants to leave, they understood that even they were to go. As a result, no one but his brothers remained (*Haamek Davar*).

2. ויתן את-קלו בבכי — He cried uncontrollably [lit. and he gave his voice in weeping].

— He gave his voice free rein, and kept it back no longer. ... Such an uncontrolled sobbing is a manifestation of deep feeling, of great sincerity (*R' Hirsch*). [See footnote 2 on page 1260].

וישמעו מצרים — [And] Egypt heard.

The reference is to the townsfolk (*Rashbam*).

The courtiers who had been expelled from Joseph's presence heard it for they were still in the outer courtyard (*Ramban* v. 1).

They heard Joseph's loud weeping, but they did not know why he

was crying (*Malbim*).

וישמע בית פרעה — And [then] Pharaoh's house[hold] heard.

The passage is telling us that first the townsfolk and then the members of Pharaoh's household — his ministers and courtiers — heard it (*Rashbam*).

Egypt heard it, and the royal household heard it. This is indicative of Joseph's high position. The entire land and the entire court were concerned over Joseph's emotional outburst, even though they had no idea why he was weeping (*R' Hirsch*).

The Hebrew phrase literally reads *And Pharaoh's house heard it*. *Rashi* explains that *house* refers to the servants and members of the household. In this context *בית* does not mean *house* [as it does in v. 16 where the verb שמע is used in the *niphal* and the sense is that it was heard in Pharaoh's house], but it has a similar meaning to *בית ישראל*, *House of Israel* and *בית יהודה*, *House of Judah* where the reference is to the people of Israel and Judah.

3. 'I am Joseph! Does my father still live?'

אני יוסף — I am Joseph.^[1]

He did not say 'your brother' or add 'whom you sold to Egypt' as he did later [v. 4], since he knew that some Egyptians were still outside. Even if he had been overheard, the

1. When Joseph said these two words יוסף אומר, 'I am Joseph,' God's master plan in all that had transpired became clear to them. They had no more questions. *I am Joseph* made everything crystal clear in their disconcertion notwithstanding.

So, too, will it be in the Time to Come when the Holy One, Blessed is He, will reveal Himself and announce 'I am HASHEM!' The mask will roll off of our eyes and we will fully comprehend everything that transpired throughout history (*Chofetz Chaim*).

remained with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

² He cried uncontrollably. Egypt heard, and Pharaoh's household heard.

³ And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Does my father still live?" But his brothers could not

listening Egyptians would surmise that he was sold only by Ishmaelites, as had been thought heretofore (*Abarbanel*; *Haamek Davar*).

הָעוֹר אָבִי חַי — Does my father still live? [see 43:27]

Joseph's primary concern was about his father (*R' Bachya*).

[The brothers mentioned several times that their father was alive, so the question obviously has a deeper connotation.]

— Is it indeed possible that he survived all these sorrows? (*Sforno*).

As noted in the commentary to

43:27 the word חַי, *alive*, also means *vigorous*, and it is possible that the intent of the question was: Is Father still vigorous; is he healthy? (*Tur*).

According to *Abarbanel*, Joseph now asked them this directly — although he had already heard through the interpreter that his father was alive — in order to draw them into conversation and show them that he was friendly toward them. He intended to continue this line of conversation and ask them about their wives and children, but since they were so startled at his revelation that they did not answer

1. The dialogue that led up to the revelation.

According to the *Midrashim* as noted, a bitter denunciatory dialogue between Judah and Joseph accompanied Judah's speech. Some excerpts:

Judah: 'I took responsibility for the safety of my brother.'

Joseph: 'Why didn't you take responsibility for your other brother when you sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver and grieved your old father, who did you no wrong? Regarding this one who did wrong and stole the goblet, tell your father: "The rope has followed the bucket."' *

Judah called to his brother Naftali: 'Go and see how many markets there are in Egypt,' whereupon he leapt forth, returned and told him: 'Twelve.' Judah said: 'I will destroy three of them; the rest of you, take one market each and spare no one.' His brothers answered him: 'Judah, Egypt is not Shechem! Should you destroy Egypt, you thereby destroy the whole world [since the whole world depends upon Egypt for food] (*Matnas Kehunah*).'

Judah was determined, however. He said, 'The fire of Shechem burns within me.'

'It is not the fire of Shechem,' Joseph replied, 'but the fire that burned when you wanted to burn your daughter-in-law Tamar [despite her innocence]. — I will douse it.'

Judah said, 'Now I will go forth and dye all the markets of Egypt in blood!'

'You were dyers even before, when you dyed your brother's tunic and told your father he was mangled by wild beasts!' Joseph countered. *

Joseph could no longer restrain himself and resolved to reveal himself. He saw that a full battle was about to rage and he wanted to avoid that.

Joseph said, 'Did you not say that the brother of this one [Benjamin, referring to himself] is dead? I purchased him. I am going to call him and he will come to you.' He began to call: 'Joseph the son of Jacob, come to me! Joseph the son of Jacob come to me! Speak with your brothers who sold you.' The brothers looked to the four corners of the house. Said Joseph to them: 'Why do you look here and there? I am Joseph!' whereupon their souls flew out and they could not answer him (*Midrash Rabbah*; *Tanchuma*; *Tanchuma Yashan*).

ויגש מה/ד ו אתו כי נבהלו מפניו: ויאמר יוסף אל- אחיו גשו-נא אלי ויגשו ויאמר אני יוסף אחיכם אשר-מכרתם אתי מצרימה:

this question, he proceeded to be more specific and defend his statement that he was indeed the brother they had sold.

Ralbag suggests that Joseph meant the question seriously. He was concerned that Judah might have been harping on an 'aged father' merely to gain sympathy, when in reality Jacob was no longer alive. [Judah had spoken inaccurately about his brother's 'death' — which Rashi justifies (see 44:20) — and Joseph wanted to be sure that now that he revealed himself, they were entirely truthful; so he repeated the question (*Torah Temimah*).]

Many commentators perceive an implication of bitter rebuke in these words, as if Joseph were saying to Judah and his brothers: What have you all done! How did you expect

my father to survive all of the suffering and grief you heaped upon him! [See footnote next verse.]

ולא-יכלו אחיו לענות אתו כי נבהלו מפניו — But his brothers could not answer him because they felt disconcerted before him.

— They were overwhelmed by shame (*Rashi*).⁽¹⁾

That is, they perceived the full implication of this revelation and they were remorseful and ashamed of what they had done to him (*Chizkuni*; *Bchor Shor*).

They were confused and frightened over his revelation, and they were concerned that he might seek revenge (*Malbim*).

— They vacillated between belief and utter disbelief. On the one hand, he mentioned the name Joseph, while on the other hand, they could not bring themselves to

1. The Talmud [*Chagigah* 4b] records that when R' Eleazar came to our passage. *But the brothers could not answer him because they felt disconcerted before him*, he wept. 'If such is the result of a rebuke by a flesh and blood human being,' R' Eleazar exclaimed, 'how much more so must it be when someone is rebuked by the Holy One Blessed is He!'

The Midrash similarly records: R' Yochanan said, Woe to us for fear of the Day of Judgment! Woe to us for fear of the Day of Retribution! [ווי לנו מיום הדין, וי לנו מיום התוכחה]. In the case of Joseph who said to his brothers *I am Joseph your brother*, their souls flew out, how much more so when the Holy One Blessed is He will stand in judgment, as it is written [*Malachi* 3:2]: *Who will survive the day of His coming?* And if his own brothers were frightened of him, how much more so when the Holy One Blessed is He comes to judge us for neglect of His commands and the violation of the Torah!

The commentators ponder: What rebuke did Joseph give them to inspire such fear? According to the Torah's narrative, he said nothing about the sale!

Maharsha suggests that they cowered in expectation that Joseph might rebuke them for everything they perpetrated upon him.

Bais HaLevi explains that Joseph's question — *does my father still live?* — was an implied reply to Judah's plea for compassion for Jacob, as if to say: 'You plead for mercy for your father? How is it that you yourselves showed no mercy for his life when you callously sold me — his beloved son?' His brothers could not answer him, so startled were they by him.

Kli Yakar perceives Joseph's rebuke to be intimidated by his use of the word *my*, rather than *our*, *father*, as if to imply that after the way they mistreated Jacob they could not consider him their father.

[According to the Midrash cited in the previous footnote, however, there is no doubt that Joseph's declaration was associated with bitter reproof. This accounts for the brothers' fright which inspired R' Eleazar and R' Yochanan's outbursts.]

answer him because they felt disconcerted before him.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me, if you please," and they came close. And he said, "I am Joseph your brother — it is me, whom you sold

believe that the young brother they had once sold, shackled as a slave, was now the supreme ruler of Egypt (R' Yosef Kara; Daas Zekeinim).

Others translate the phrase: '... because they shrank away from his presence.'

4. Joseph's question, as noted, was primarily an expression of astonishment; therefore, he did not wait for an answer (R' Munk).

וְיֹסֵף אָמַר — Come close to me, if you please.

Seeing that they were recoiling from him, Joseph thought 'My brothers now feel ashamed.' He therefore beckoned them in a mild and gentle language [saying וְיֹסֵף אָמַר, if you please], and then he showed them that he was circumcised [as proof that he was indeed Joseph] (Rashi from Midrash).

⁵ Actually, as we have seen earlier, Joseph had forced all the Egyptians to submit to circumcision [see *comm.* to 41:55]. Presumably he told them this as well since that was the greatest possible proof that he was Joseph (Gur Aryeh; Yad Yosef).

1. We will learn later in the Book of Exodus how the Israelites deserved redemption from Egypt in the merit of four things: a) they did not change their names [to non-Hebrew names]; b) they did not change their language; c) they separated themselves from immorality; d) they did not indulge in לשון הרע, evil gossip.

In his revelation to his brothers, Joseph intimated that though he was in a strange land, he too was scrupulous about these four things. By stating *I am Joseph* he indicated that though Pharaoh had given him a foreign name *Tzafenas Paane'ach*, his name was still Joseph; by stating [v. 12] *it is my mouth that is speaking to you* he intimated that he still spoke Hebrew; by showing them that he was circumcised he intimated that he had kept away from immorality; by saying *come close to me* he intimated that he did not want Benjamin to hear their discussion of the sale, thus avoiding the sin of evil gossip (Kli Yakar).

2. Sfats Emes comments that Joseph's choice of words — וְיֹסֵף אָמַר, lit., *whom you sold* — carried with it an implication of consolation for his brothers. The word וְיֹסֵף אָמַר is sometimes interpreted by the Sages to be related to אִשּׁוּר, approval. In this sense, they expound that God expressed approval of Moses' decision to smash the first Tablets of the Ten Commandments

Furthermore, only the populace — who came for rations — were subject to the circumcision decree; Joseph, as the supreme ruler, was not required to undergo circumcision. That he was circumcised proved he was Joseph (Chizkuni).

Many commentators suggest that the Midrash cited by Rashi is not to be taken literally, as it would have been immodest for Joseph to have exposed himself even to his own brothers. Rather, the intent is that he told them he had been circumcised.

According to Sforno, Abarbanel, and most others, Joseph's purpose in asking them to come near him was that those who overheard his weeping should not hear him speak of the sale, which was a topic of great embarrassment to them.^[1]

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יוֹסֵף אֲחִיכֶם אֲשֶׁר מָכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי מִצְרַיִם — And he said, 'I am Joseph your brother — it is me whom you sold into Egypt.' [lit. that you sold me to Egypt].^[2]

Even while you were selling me, I retained brotherly feelings towards you (Abarbanel; see Or HaChaim).

— And I still consider myself your brother — retaining even now

וַיִּגַּשׁ מֶלֶךְ הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-יִצְחָק בְּעֵינָיִם כִּי-
מִכְרֹתָם אֶתִּי הֵנָּה כִּי לְמַחְיָה שָׁלַחֲנִי
וְאֱלֹהִים לְפָנֶיכֶם: כִּי-זֶה שְׁנֵתִים הָרַעַב

these feelings of brotherhood (*Ibn Caspi*);

The only reason I mention this unpleasant event is because it is the best proof that I am Joseph. No one but us knows that you sold me or that I am your brother; even those who purchased me from you did not know we were brothers (*Sforno*).

He whispered this to them quietly so that even Benjamin would not hear. He also promised not to tell Jacob what they had done (*Tz'ror HaMor*).

According to *Rashbam* and others cited in the *comm.* to 37:28 ["Who Sold Joseph?"] who interpret that Midianites passed Joseph's pit, hauled him out and sold him *without the knowledge of the brothers* to the Ishmaelites who were passing by, Joseph charged: *whom you sold to Egypt*, only in the sense that his brothers were *responsible* for the sale because they threw him into the pit in the first place.

וַיִּגַּשׁ מֶלֶךְ הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-יִצְחָק בְּעֵינָיִם
כִּי-מִכְרֹתָם אֶתִּי הֵנָּה — *And now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourselves* [lit. *and do not be angry in*

your eyes] *for having* [or: *that you have*] *sold me here.*

— For one should grieve only for having done evil, but, as you shall see, your act resulted in great good (*Abarbanel*).^[1]

Joseph had observed that they were distressed and angry with themselves for having sold him because he had heard them say [42:21], *Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother*, etc. (*Akeidah*; Or *HaChaim*).

[... And, following *Rashi's* Midrashic comment above, Joseph knew they were remorseful because they cowered away in shame when he revealed himself.]

Do not be angry with yourselves for having sold me here — after all, it is you to whom I owe the exalted position I now hold here in Egypt (*R' Hirsch*).

The word *now* is emphatic, as if to say that they should not be distressed *now* — but *later* there would indeed be cause for distress. The Kabbalists perceive the prophetic implication of the passage to be one of intimated punishment at a future time: 'Be not grieved, for your generation will not suffer for what you did, but an outgrowth of your sale will be the cruelty of the Egyptian exile, and eventually you will be punished through your descendants with the imperial decree against the Ten Martyrs' [who were slain during the Roman Persecutions on account of the sale of Joseph by the ten

upon seeing the Jews worshiping the Golden Calf. God said to Moses [Exod. 34:1] אֲשֶׁר שָׁבַרְתָּ [lit. *which you broke*], which the Sages interpret as implying יִשְׂרָאֵל כֹּחַךְ שֶׁשָּׁבַרְתָּ, *more power to you* [an expression of thanks and approval (*Rashi*)] for having broken the Tablets (*Shabbos* 87a).

Similarly Joseph comforted his brothers by saying אֲשֶׁר מִכְרֹתָם, as if to say 'Thank you for selling me, because my presence in Egypt made it possible for me to save the world, and especially our family, from famine. In 50:20 Joseph explicitly expressed the same thought to his brothers.

1. Joseph's reconciliation vs. the brother's moral responsibility

[Although Joseph attributed his ordeal to God's providential preparation for the eventual growth of Israel into a great nation, this was not to imply that the brothers were guiltless of any wrong-doing. They sold him without knowledge of God's plan, and surely had to re-

45 into Egypt. ⁵ And now, be not distressed, nor
5-6 reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it
was to be a provider that God sent me ahead of you.
⁶ For this has been two of the hunger years in the

brothers; see *comm.* to p. 1650] (*Ashtruc, Midrashei HaTorah*).

[*Comp. comm.* to 50:17 s.v. וְעָתָה אֶפְשָׁא.]

In the Midrash [*Bereishis Rabbah* 21:6] the word וְעָתָה is said always to be associated with repentance.

כִּי לְמַחְזֵק שְׁלַחְנִי אֱלֹהִים לְפָנֶיךָ — For it was to be a provider [to serve you as a source of sustenance (*Rashi*)], that God sent me ahead of you.

God, not you, sent me here. His purpose was to implant me here to preserve life; therefore you need not be distressed. Obviously, you were chosen only to be His instrument for accomplishing this goal. All of us were destined to descend to Egypt in fulfillment of God's decree that Abraham's descendants would be aliens in a foreign land [15:13]. Normally we should have gone to Egypt in iron fetters [in the manner of all enslaved exiles], but the Holy One Blessed is He chose to orchestrate events so that Father and the rest of you would be spared the harshness of a forced descent into hostile conditions, and instead sent me down here to prepare the way and provide for you so you could follow in honor (gathered from *Tanchuma; Lekach Tov; Sechel Tov*). [See footnotes to 37:12, 15 and especially to 32:1.]

Midrash HaGadol records: Our

pent their deed. Rather, Joseph's conciliatory words should be understood as an expression of faith that whatever happened to him was God's will. Had it not been brought about by the brothers, it would have happened some other way. Therefore, he felt no personal animosity toward them, since he looked only at the outcome: God's purpose was obviously that Joseph be raised to power and prominence and that he be the one to provide for his family and many countries in time of hunger.

As for the brothers, that they had been the instruments in causing him to lose his freedom and suffer for so many years must demonstrate that they were not innocent parties. As the

Sages accordingly observed that even the wrongs committed by the righteous are of service to the world; how much more so their righteous deeds!

Rambam, in *Moreh Nevuchim* 2:48, cites our verse as an example of how the Torah attributes to God, as the First Cause, an act that is accomplished by a human agency. Although the brothers are the ones who 'sent' Joseph, the act is attributed to God as Prime Mover of all events. As *Abarbanel* writes, although the brothers had Free Will, God Himself guided their judgment so that they acted in accord with the Divine Plan [see footnote previous verse].

The word מַחְזֵק, from חָזַק, *life*, means *sustenance*. *Rashi* accordingly interprets that the literal expression וְעָתָה לְפָנֶיךָ, *for to [or: as] sustenance really means: for to be for you a [source of] sustenance*. As *R' Meyuchas* explains it: *To prepare sustenance for you*.

6. Joseph proceeds to elaborate on the extent of what he means by 'for a provider.' He repeats that he considers the chain of events and his own extraordinary destiny to be part of the Master Plan that was to save Jacob's family from a famine (*R'Hirsch*).

כִּי זֶה שְׁנַתִּים הָרָבָב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ — For this has been two of the hunger years in the midst of the land [lit. for this is two years of the famine in the midst of the land.]

Following *Rashi*: For two years

בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ וְעוֹד חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין-
 חֲרִישׁ וְקָצִיר: וַיִּשְׁלַחֲנִי אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵיכֶם
 לְשׁוֹם לָכֶם שְׂאֲרִית בְּאָרֶץ וּלְהַחְיֹת
 לָכֶם לִפְלִיטָה גְדֹלָה: וְעַתָּה לֹא-אַתֶּם
 שְׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הִנֵּה כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׁמַנִּי
 לְאֵב לִפְרָעָה וּלְאָדוֹן לְכָל-בֵּיתוֹ וּמִשָּׁל

have passed of the [seven-year] famine that is to befall the land.

ועוד חמש שנים אשר אין חריש וקציר
 — And there are yet five years in which there shall be neither plowing nor harvest.

If there is no plowing there will certainly be no harvest. Why, then, the redundancy? — The connotation is that although the first two years possibly yielded a small residual harvest, in the subsequent five years there would be none at all — not even a spontaneous growth. Accordingly, it would appear that people did not even work the land during the later years of the famine. It was so noticeably parched that planting would have been futile (Akeidas Yitzchak).

Joseph mentioned the impending years of famine (although it was common knowledge) to stress, as noted, that a land which had en-

dured two years of famine — during which the people had consumed most of their reserves causing prices to soar, and which was destined to experience yet another five years — could offer them no sustenance whatever, had God not dispatched him to provide for their sustenance (Ramban).

[This is one of the rare instances where Onkelos renders חריש (plowing) as זריעה, planting. See Shaarei Aharon.]

וַיִּשְׁלַחֲנִי אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵיכֶם לְשׁוֹם לָכֶם. 7. — Thus [lit. and] God has sent me ahead of you to insure your survival in the land [lit. to place for you a remnant in the land].

— God thereby “provided the cure before the blow” by not inflicting famine on the Tribal Ancestors until He first sent Joseph to provide for them and assure their survival (Abarbanel).

That He sent me was not for my

Sages teach חובה על ידי חטא, guilt [i.e., an evil deed] is brought about through a guilty party (Shabbos 32a), meaning that God does not cause completely righteous people to carry out an unrighteous act, even if the act is necessary.

R' Hirsch writes that Joseph repeatedly emphasized to his brothers that the extraordinary sequence of events that brought him from the pit to the throne was undeniably a plan prearranged by God in order to save Jacob's family and set the stage for its development into a nation. This saga provided an insight into God's directing Hand in universal history. In the case of Joseph, retrospect showed how everything fit into His plan; it should be understood as a lesson that all other events are equally in accordance with His will, though they are not so easily understood.

The promise made to Abraham at the ברית בין הבתרים, Covenant between the Parts (Chapter 15) came true because, as our Sages expressed it, of ‘the fine woolen cloak, worth two selas, which Jacob had given to Joseph.’ To preserve its integrity, this family of Jacob had to be formed into a nation in the midst of surroundings so hostile, both from a national and a cultural point of view, that assimilation would be impossible. No country complied better with these conditions than Egypt, which thus became the crucible, the ‘iron furnace’ (Deut. 4:20) wherein the Jewish people was forged.

midst of the land, and there are yet five years in which there shall be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ Thus God has sent me ahead of you to insure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance. ⁸ And now: It was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me father to Pharaoh, master of his entire household, and ruler throughout

benefit, for my merit is no greater than yours. His purpose was to insure your survival in the land (*Lekach Tov*).

This passage is reminiscent of Ezra's statement [Ezra 9:8]: *And now for a little moment grace has been shown by HASHEM our God to leave us a remnant to escape ... and give us a little reviving in our bondage* (R' Shmuel ben Chofni Gaon).

וְלִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לְפָלִיטָה גְדֹלָה — *And to sustain you for a momentous [lit. large] deliverance.*

God sent me here so that there would be a refuge for you in Egypt by virtue of the fact that I am the ruler of Egypt and will arrange for you to be received with lavish hospitality (*Haamek Davar*).

The deliverance must indeed be a *momentous* [lit. *large*] one since you number seventy souls and possess much livestock (*Abarbanel; Malbim*).

Alternatively, the essence of the phrase is: ... *And to keep you alive so you may develop into a large remnant*. Although at this time, they were still a relatively small extended family, Joseph perceived that God had laid the groundwork for the emergence of the House of Israel as a great nation (R' David Feinstein).

R' Hirsch conjectures that the verse may mean *וְלִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לְפָלִיטָה* [the land] *for your benefit גְדֹלָה* [so that its riches will serve to provide] *a momentous deliverance* [for you].

Egypt's prosperity was Divinely ordained for your sake.

HaK'sav V'HaKabbalah maintains that had the phrase meant to *sustain* you, as *Abarbanel* and many others interpret it, the Hebrew would have read *לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם*. Reading as it does, the word *לָכֶם* [lit. *to you*] connotes, as it often does, *שְׁלָכֶם*, that which is yours — in this case: [to sustain] your household. Compare this use of the prefix *ל* indicating *של*, of, as in the phrases *שְׁלִי הֵם=לִי הֵם*; *שְׁלִי מִי=לְמִי*; *שְׁלִי הֵם=לָהּ*.

וְעַתָּה לֹא־אַתָּם שְׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הִנֵּה כִּי 8. — *And now: It was not you who sent me here, but God* [lit. the God; i.e., God in His Aspect of ELOHIM, representing the Attribute of Divine Justice (see on 1:2).]

The *now* is emphatic, and Joseph was stressing that he bore no hatred for them: When you first sold me, it was inexplicable to me how brothers could act this way towards one another. *Now*, however, that God's plan has become apparent, it becomes clear in retrospect that it was not you who sent me here but God. You were acting only as His instruments and accordingly I harbor absolutely no hatred toward you (*Akeidah; Or HaChaim*).

וְיִשְׁמְעֵנִי לֹאֵב לְפָרְעֹה — *And He has made me father to Pharaoh.*

'Father' has the figurative meaning of colleague and patron (*Rashi*).

According to *Ibn Ezra* 'father' in this context means *mentor*.

[Comp. the designation of Joseph

ט בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: מְהֵרָה וְעָלוּ אֶל-אָבִי
וְאָמַרְתָּם אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר בְּנֵךְ יוֹסֵף שְׁמִנִי
אֱלֹהִים לְאָדוֹן לְכָל-מִצְרַיִם רָדָה אֵלַי
י אֶל-תַּעֲמֹד: וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בְּאֶרֶץ-גֶּשֶׁן וְהָיִיתָ
קְרוֹב אֵלַי אִתָּהּ וּבְנֶיךָ וּבְנֵי בְנֶיךָ וְצֹאנֶךָ
יא וּבִקְרֶךָ וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר-לָךְ: וְכָלכְּלָתִי אִתָּךְ

as 'Avrech' = *father of the king*, in 41:43.]

[And] master of his entire house[hold].

— Everyone in his household calls me 'master' (*Sechel Tov*).

In Hebrew the term אָדוֹן denotes lordship over servants. Thus, the connotation of our phrase is that everyone in Pharaoh's household was considered Joseph's servant (*HaRechasim LeBik'ah*).

— And ruler throughout the entire land of Egypt.

I decree and they fulfill (*Sechel Tov*).

Joseph stressed his exalted position to allude to the tradition that God forgives all the sins of one who gains high position. Consequently, they all could assume that God had forgiven him for his sin of slandering them to Jacob [37:2] (*Tz'ror HaMor*).

9. מְהֵרָה וְעָלוּ אֶל-אָבִי — Hurry — [and] go up to my father.

Hurry — So he will stop worrying (*Sforno*).

Hurry! Do not fail to take advantage of this propitious hour! (*Midrash*).

He used the verb go up since Eretz

Yisrael is the highest of all the [neighboring] countries. [See *comm.* to 12:10; 13:1] (*Rashi*).

— And say to him.

[By your informing Father of my whereabouts you will in effect annul the solemn ban you imposed against telling him, which has prevented me from contacting him until now. See footnote on p. 1653, and *comm.* to end of v. 1 above.]

— So said your son Joseph.

— Your son — the son you love most (*Lekach Tov*).

The expression כֹּה אָמַר, *So said*, is the formula used to introduce prophecy. By using this expression, he was intimating that his request was prophetically inspired (*Lekach Tov*).

— God has made me master of all Egypt.

Accordingly, it is in my power to assure you a secluded dwelling place, not among the Egyptians, since I know you would want to live apart from them (*Alshich; Haamek Davar*).

And the cares of State imposed upon me by my position do not permit me to come to you; therefore please come down to me (*Abarbanel*).

1. "As I mentioned before," Joseph said, "Father and the rest of his family should have been brought down to Egypt in iron chains to begin the predestined servitude, but God in His compassion spared us all the harshness of a forced descent. However, this is the predestined time and you must hurry and summon Father now! Who knows what the morrow will bring? Should you neglect this propitious moment, then you might forfeit that grace and you might all yet have to be brought down in chains" (*Agra d'Kallah*).

45 the entire land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry — go up to my
9-11 father and say to him, 'So said your son Joseph:
"God has made me master of all Egypt. Come down
to me please; do not delay. ¹⁰ You will reside in the
land of Goshen and you will be near to me — you,
your sons, your grandchildren, your flock and herd
and all that is yours. ¹¹ And I will provide for you

רָחַם אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרָיִם — Come down to
me, please; do not delay.

['As I emphasized before, my responsibilities here make it impossible for me to leave. The Divine scheme — so apparent in what has occurred — makes it imperative that I remain here, and that you join me. Therefore, come down to me, please, do not delay.']

Come with your entire family and possessions, as enumerated in the next verse (Ramban).

Do not delay. Do not let time wait for you (Midrash).

[The word 'please' is not in the Hebrew; it is suggested by the courteous form רָחַם instead of the usual imperative דָּר. See comm. to שְׁכַח to 27:19.]

10. וְיָשַׁבְתָּ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן — [And] You
will reside in the land [i.e. region] of
Goshen.

— Away from the idolatrous Egyptians (Malbim), for Joseph knew that Jacob would not want to live in the land of Egypt where the royal palace was [with the resultant swirl of social and political activity] (Ramban).

גֹּשֶׁן Goshen.

Goshen was a fertile region in the Northeast of Egypt, east of the Nile delta. The Israelites lived there throughout their stay in Egypt, their primary residence being in Ramses, its major city. Goshen contained Egypt's most fertile soil and in 47:6 it is described as the best of the land.

Joseph purposely assigned this region to his family to keep them segregated

from the mainstream of Egypt's idolatrous, immoral life, and to allow them to freely pursue their shepherding which was hateful to the Egyptians.

That Goshen was selected for their residence was not haphazard. According to Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer cited in the footnote to 12:16, an earlier Pharaoh had given the region of Goshen to Sarah, and it was appropriate that her descendants settle there.

The territory in Judah by the name of Goshen [Josh. 10:41] is not to be confused with the Goshen in Egypt (Radak).

The Arabs identify Goshen as Wadi Tumeilat, but Egyptians Jews believe that Goshen is Fayum, the later residence of R' Saadia Gaon. R' Saadia himself, in his translation of the Torah, renders Goshen as Al-Sadir. [See also 46:28].

וְהָיִיתָ קָרוֹב אֵלַי — And you will be near to me.

Though my position forces me to live in the metropolis, at least you will be relatively near to me; I will be able to visit and look after you (Abarbanel; Alshich).

אֶתָּה וּבְנֶיךָ וּבְנֵי בְנֶיךָ וְצִמְּךָ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לְךָ — You, [and] your sons, [and] your grandchildren, [and] your flock and [your] herd and all that is yours.

— This phrase reverts to modify the end of the previous verse: Please come down to me; do not delay ... you, your children, your children's children, etc. (Ramban).

He mentioned the flocks and

ויגש מהיב שם ביעור חמש שנים רעב פן תנרש
 יב אתה וביתך וכל אשר לך: והנה עיניכם
 ראות ועיני אחי בנימין ביפי המדבר

herds as well because in Canaan Jacob had to graze his cattle in faraway Shechem, and now because of the famine there were no longer any grazing lands available there (*Abarbanel*).

11. *And I will provide for you there.*

I.e., in Goshen. However, I cannot provide for if you remain in Canaan since I will be charged with sending money out of the country (*Malbim*; see *Ramban* below).

The Midrash [*Kohes Zuta*] invokes this passage to illustrate how *there are no riches to the intelligent* [*Eccles. 9:11*]: Only a short while earlier, the man [Jacob] increased exceedingly [above 30:43] indicating that he grew immensely wealthy — and now he required Joseph's promise of support.

For there [will be] five more years of famine.

— This famine will not end soon. Whatever hesitations you may have about coming here must be set aside — you must come soon (*Abarbanel*).

So you do not become destitute, you, [and] your house[hold] and all that is yours.

The translation of תנרש as *destitute* follows *Rashi*. He cites *Onkelos* who renders תתמסקן [you will (not) become poor]; it is similar to the word of the same root [רש or ריש] in *1 Sam. 2:7* where we find the expression מוריש ומעשיר, *God impoverishes and enriches*. [See *Ohev*

Ger; *Ya'ér*; *Lechem V'Simlah*; *Mizrachi*; *Karnei Or*.]

According to *Ibn Ezra* the term is related to the root ירש, *cut off; dispossessed*, as in *Deut. 4:38*: להוריש גוים. [The continuity of the verses, according to this interpretation, is: *God sent me ahead of you to assure survival for you in the land* [v. 7] ... *Therefore come down to me* [v. 9] ... *And I will provide for you* [v. 11] ... *lest you be utterly cut off from the land* (*Abarbanel*).]

Rashbam similarly interprets *lest you be driven out of the land* — by the force of the famine.¹¹

Ramban agrees with the interpretation *impoverished*. To his brothers Joseph had implied that they would die unless they came to him, saying [v. 5]: *for it was to serve you as a source of sustenance that God has sent me ahead of you*; [v. 7]: *to provide refuge for you ... and to save your lives ...* But out of respect to Jacob, he expressed himself much more mildly to him, saying only that they would become *impoverished* if they remained in Canaan. Joseph could not be expected to send large supplies of food from the royal storehouses to Canaan lest the Egyptians suspect him of privately trading in food and accumulating a personal fortune with the intention of returning to his homeland. However, were his family to come to Egypt the king would surely grant permission to sustain them.

— The apprehension that they might become impoverished proves that they had been wealthy (*Lekach Tov*).

12. [The brothers had been standing dumbfounded before him all this time; Joseph was apprehensive

1. Figuratively, the connotation was: *Lest you become impoverished of your Torah studies*. Joseph suggested to Jacob: Better that you come down here even though it means leaving *Eretz Yisrael*, than you become impoverished of Torah, for you will not be able to study there because of the famine (*Tur*).

there — for there will be five more years of famine — so you do not become destitute, you, your household, and all that is yours.”

¹² “Behold! Your eyes see as do the eyes of my brother Benjamin that it is my mouth that is speaking

that they still might be doubtful about his true identity, so he proceeds to reassure them again that he is really Joseph.]

וְהִנֵּה עֵינֶיכֶם רֹאיוֹת וְעֵינֵי אָחִי בְנִימִין — And behold! Your eyes see as do [lit. and] the eyes of my brother, Benjamin.

I.e., your eyes see my glory, and that I am your brother, for I am circumcised as you are [see *comm.* to v. 4 above] (*Rashi*) ...

As do the eyes of my brother Benjamin who did not know I was sold [but thought me to be dead; even he would admit I am Joseph (*Chizkuni*)] (*Sforno*).

Rashi [basing himself on *Megillah* 16b] notes that Joseph made a point of singling out Benjamin and equating him with the other brothers, as if to say: Just as I do not hate him, for he was not implicated in my sale, so I do not hate you.

כִּי־פִי הַמְדַבֵּר אֵלֵיכֶם — That it is my mouth that is speaking to you.

— In the Holy Tongue (Hebrew) [i.e., without my interpreter. When you relate this to Father he will believe that I am indeed Joseph.] (*Rashi*; *Tanchuma*; *Targum Yonasan*)

Ramban cites the above-quoted opinion of most commentators that Joseph

was invoking his knowledge of Hebrew as uncontested proof of his identity. *Ramban*, maintains, however, that this must have been intended merely as an additional assurance, but surely not as conclusive proof. The viceroy's ability to speak Hebrew could not prove he was Joseph, for, as *Ramban* suggests, many Egyptians — particularly officials — must have spoken Hebrew since it was the native language of the neighboring Canaanite nation. We find similarly that Nebuchadnezzar spoke Hebrew and all his courtiers understood him [see *Daniel* 2:2,3]. In *Ramban's* opinion, Abraham did not bring the Hebrew language with him from Ur or Haran, for they spoke Aramaic there. This is evidenced by Laban's use of the Aramaic term *yegar* for 'heap.'¹¹

Furthermore, just as Joseph had come from Canaan, there must have been others from there. Besides, the brothers' best proof that the viceroy was Joseph was his familiarity with the sale [which only Joseph could have known] and his knowledge of the name Joseph, saying, I am Joseph your brother — he whom you sold to Egypt [v. 4].

Rather, *Ramban* maintains, it is my mouth that is speaking to you means: I — who, as you have all seen, have the authority to do so — promise to sustain you. Therefore go summon my father ...

— I did not assure you through an intermediary of my support, but it was my own mouth that spoke to you, and you need not fear that I will deny it

1. *Ozaim L'Torah* suggests that the intent of 'Holy Tongue' is not so much that they ascertained his identity from his speaking Hebrew, for as noted the interpreter also spoke Hebrew! Rather the meaning is that Joseph was emphasizing how he spoke in a holy manner — the Name of Heaven was ever-present in his mouth; he always invoked God in his expressions: For to save life God has sent me ahead of you; ... it was not you who sent me here but God; ... God has made me master of all Egypt. Isaac also recognized קוֹל יַעֲקֹב, the 'voice' of Jacob by the fact that he always invoked the Name of Heaven [see *comm.* to 27:22].

ויגש מהיגיד יג אליכם: והגדתם לאבי את-כל-כבודי במצרים ואת כל-אשר ראיתם ומהרתם והורדתם את-אבי הנה: ויפל על-צווארי בנימן אחיו ויבך ובנימן בכה על-

afterward (*Hadar Zekeinim*).

According to *Or HaChaim*, the 'proof' Joseph was invoking was not his knowledge of the Hebrew language. Rather he meant that his brothers could recognize his voice when he spoke in Hebrew, which they could not do when he spoke in the unfamiliar Egyptian.

— Furthermore Joseph was emphasizing how his pronunciation and accent were entirely like his brothers; no Egyptian could possibly speak Hebrew with such a native accent (*Nesinah laGer*).

'When you sold me, no one but us was present who spoke Hebrew, for the traders were Ishmaelites' [thus, if I am quoting your discussion of the sale in Hebrew, I can only be Joseph] (*Sforno*).

The primary interpretation is: The news you are to tell my father was not heard from others as hearsay. With your own eyes, you have seen and recognize that I — Joseph your brother — am speaking to you. Therefore [v. 13]: *Tell my father of all my glory etc.* (*Rashbam*).

What you have seen here proves that I predicted these events correctly when I related my dreams to you as a youth [37:7] (*Ashturuc*).

The Sages in *Megillah* 16b expound the passage to imply: כפי: *As my mouth [speaks] so my heart [feels]* [i.e., what I am saying to you reflects my innermost feelings].

Compare *R' Shmuel ben Chofni* who interprets the syntactical flow of the verse to be: What you have seen here with your own eyes attests to the fact that I, with my own mouth, am speaking to you.

Others explain that Joseph was now explaining that modesty prevented him from describing the full extent of his

privileged position in Egypt. *Since it is my own mouth that is speaking to you it would be unseemly for me to boast about myself.* יהללך זר ולא פירן (*Prov. 27:2*).] But I rely on you to help induce Father to come by telling him what you have seen here in Egypt (*Abarbanel; Malbim; HaKsav V'HaKabalah*).

13. והגדתם לאבי את-כל-כבודי במצרים — *Therefore, tell my father of all my glory in Egypt.*

Knowing that it would not be an easy task to persuade Jacob to leave the Holy Land, Joseph again emphasizes the importance of convincing him of Joseph's position in Egypt and the urgency that the family reunite there (*Ralbag*).

ואת כל-אשר ראיתם — *And all that you saw.*

— I.e., even that which out of modesty I declined to mention. Do not tell Father only what I told you to say, but add to it from your own experiences and observations. Convince him that I can provide well for him, and persuade him to come (*Ralbag; Akeidah*).

ומהרתם והורדתם את אבי הנה — *But you must hurry, and bring my father down here.*

Hurry — so he may experience joy at seeing all of this (*Sforno*).

[What joy could Joseph have expected his righteous father Jacob to experience upon seeing him as viceroy of Egypt? True, the reunion after twenty-two years would bring the aged Patriarch boundless joy. But how this joy would be tempered with anxiety! For Jacob would certainly be apprehensive about how Joseph's posterity could have possibly maintained his spirituality in the pagan, im-

45 to you. ¹³ Therefore, tell my father of all my glory in
13-15 Egypt and all that you saw. But you must hurry, and
bring my father down here."

¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck
and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ He

moral culture of Egypt. This why Jacob had the burning desire to gaze upon Joseph's face. See *comm.* to 46:30, and Overview].

14. Joseph had cried when he revealed himself to his brothers, but those were tears of joy. Now, new tears are brought on by sadness and a premonition of suffering. He had just invited Jacob to Egypt, with all his family, to begin a national existence in exile. Though Joseph had to do as he did, still he clearly foresaw that this Egyptian exile would not be the last in the history of his people. As he embraced his brothers, he had the vision that Providence had many other trials and hardships in store for them. This combination of joy and sadness is typical of the Jewish people; even while thanking God for His infinite mercy — *הודו לה' בִּי טוֹב, give praise to HASHEM for He is good* — we tremble at the thought of the future. Thereupon, we beseech God's help, *אָנָּה ה' הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא, please*

HASHEM bring salvation now (R' Munk).

וַיִּפֹּל עַל-צְוָאֲרֵי בְנִימִן-אָחִיו וַיִּבְךְ —
Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck [lit. necks] and wept.

In the literal sense: Since they were brothers from the same father and mother their love for each other was very strong; therefore each wept on the other's neck (*Radak*).

The implication of the plural is that he wept on both sides of his neck (*Chizkuni*).

Midrashically, Joseph wept for the two Temples that would be in Benjamin's territory [the Temple Mount was in his portion; see footnote 2 on page 1449] and would suffer destruction (*Rashi*).¹¹

וַיִּנָּמֶן בְּרֶכֶּה עַל צְוָאֲרֵי — And Benjamin wept upon his neck.

For the Tabernacle of Shiloh which was destined to be in Joseph's territory and would likewise be destroyed (*Rashi*).

1. *Rashi's* basis for the exegesis

The commentators explain *Rashi's* exegesis to be based upon *Midrash Rabbah* 89:12 and *Megillah* 16b. The Midrash reads: "And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's [צְוָאֲרֵי] necks and wept. [The word צְוָאֲרֵי is plural]. Did Benjamin have two necks? — In fact, said R' Eleazar, Joseph foresaw through Divine Inspiration that two Temples based in Benjamin's territory, would be destroyed. And Benjamin wept upon his neck, for Benjamin saw that the Tabernacle of Shiloh would be built in Joseph's territory and would be destroyed." [The connection between neck and the Temple is discussed below.]

The commentators grapple with why צְוָאֲרֵי, the plural necks in the first phrase should allude to two Temples, while the word צְוָאֲרֵי, — which is also plural — when used with Joseph should allude to but one Tabernacle. [See *Mizrachi*; cf. also Heidenheim].

Actually, however, *Rashi's* view on the matter is made quite clear in his commentary to *Megillah* 16b. There *Rashi* comments that no inference is to be drawn from the plural of צְוָאֲרֵי, because Scripture commonly uses the plural structure of the word. For, as R' David Feinstein notes, *Rashi* maintains in *Proverbs* 1:9 that צְוָאֲרֵי, neck, usually takes the plural form in Hebrew since the trachea is composed of many rings [accordingly, no significance can be derived from the use of the plural form].

Rather, the exposition is based on the fact that this is one of the rare places in Scripture that

ויגש טו צואַריו: וינשק לְכָל־אָחיו ויבךְ עֲלֵהֶם
 מה/טו-יז טז וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן דָּבְרוּ אָחיו אִתּוֹ: וְהָקֵל נִשְׁמַע
 בֵּית פְּרָעָה לֵאמֹר בָּאוּ אַחֵי יוֹסֵף וַיִּיטֵב
 יז בְּעֵינֵי פְרָעָה וּבְעֵינֵי עֲבָדָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר

¶ Why was this particular moment of their reconciliation chosen to weep over the destruction of the future Temples?

The mutual joy of Joseph and Benjamin was so great that they could have died of ecstasy. In order to temper their joy, they were shown the destructions of the Holy Temples. Similarly, a goblet is smashed at a wedding ceremony to temper the joy of the guests and evoke the memory of the Destruction of the Temple (*Yad Yosef; Meam Loez*).

Yafeh Toar suggests that this entire Midrashic interpretation that *neck* is a metaphor for *Temples* is based on the fact that they cried only after Joseph told them to bring his father down rather than immediately after he

revealed himself to them. Upon realizing that Jacob's descent to Egypt was symbolic of all future Jewish Exiles (see *Ramban* beginning of *Vayechi*), Joseph was reminded also of the Destructions (see *Yalkut Yehudah*).

15 ויגש לְכָל־אָחיו ויבךְ עֲלֵהֶם – *He then kissed all his brothers and wept upon them.*

— To reassure all of them that he harbored no evil against them (*Ralbag*).

Kabbalistically: Because he prophetically foresaw that the Ten Tribes would be exiled and scattered among the nations (*Zohar*).

mentions weeping on the neck. Since the Torah economizes on every letter, it would not have mentioned that the weeping took place on the neck unless an allusion was intended. That allusion is the homiletical connection between neck and Temple (see below).

That Joseph wept over two destructions and Benjamin over one is based, not on exegesis, but on the historical fact that there were two Temples in Benjamin's territory and one Tabernacle in Joseph's (see *Mizrachi; Sifsei Chachamim*).

[*Torah Temimah* observes, however, that although צָוֹר usually occurs in plural, there are instances that it appears in singular, as for example צָוֹרֶךְ in 27:40, and צָוֹרֵי in 41:42. This would tend to possibly support the Midrashic question 'how many necks did Benjamin have?' Since in this case it occurs in the plural, a usage that is not universal, it is therefore suggestive of a homiletic interpretation. But as noted, *Rashi*, did not base his exposition on this fact, and wrote that the question should be omitted from the Talmud, as indeed it is in old manuscripts of the Talmud.]

¶ The homiletical metaphor of neck alluding to the Temple

This metaphor is borrowed from the Talmudic interpretation of *Songs of Songs* 4:4, — כְּמוֹנֵל דָּוִד צָוֹרֶךְ, *Your neck is like the Tower of David* — in *Berachos* 30a which perceives in *neck* an allusion to the Temple.

Maharsha there [s.v. כְּמוֹנֵל] explains: The Temple is compared to the neck which is at the top of man's body; similarly the Temple is the summit and splendor of Israel.

Shir HaShirim Rabbah 4:9 homiletically elaborates on the connection of Temple and neck:

a) As long as the Temple stood Israel was prosperous and at ease and could walk with an erect head and 'straight neck'. When the Temple was destroyed, Israel became degraded and persecuted. The neck of the Jews became 'bent'; they can no longer raise their heads among the nations;

b) Unlike other parts of the body, if the neck is cut a person can die. The neck is a human being's lifeline. The Temple is, similarly the life channel of Israel;

c) Just as a man's neck is the highest part of him, so was the Temple in the highest part of the world; and

d) Just as most ornaments are hung around the neck, so were the 'ornaments' of Israel — the Priests and Levites — attached to the Temple.

45 then kissed all his brothers and wept upon them, and
16-17 afterwards his brothers conversed with him.

¹⁶ The news was heard in Pharaoh's palace saying, "Joseph's brothers have come!" And it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. ¹⁷ Pharaoh said to Joseph,

— But they did not weep, as they stood ashamed before him (*Radak*).

Or according to the *Zohar* because they had not been granted a prophetic spirit, as were Joseph and Benjamin, informing them of future disasters.

The verb *kiss* is found both in the simple *kal* form *נִשָּׁק*, and in the intensive form *נִשְׁקָה*, as in our passage. The latter form connotes total absorption and deep emotion in this display of affection (*Heidenheim*).

וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן דִּבְּרוּ אִתּוֹ — And afterwards his brothers conversed with him.

I.e. after they saw that Joseph wept and realized that he was peaceably inclined towards them — his brothers conversed with him. Until then they felt ashamed before him (*Rashi*).

Although Joseph had wept before, the brothers thought his earlier weeping may have been caused by his memories of his troubles (*Or HaChaim*).

His brothers conversed with him — asking him about everything that had happened to him since he was separated from them, and how he had achieved his lofty status (*Radak*).

16. Pharaoh echoes Joseph's invitation and orders wagons to be sent for Jacob and his family.

וְהָקֵל נִשְׁמָע בֵּית פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר — [And] the news [lit. voice; sound] was heard [in] Pharaoh's palace [lit. house] saying.

Pharaoh's people inquired about the abundant weeping which, as

noted in v. 2, was heard in Pharaoh's house, and it was learned that Joseph's brothers had come (*Or HaChaim*).

According to *Midrash Tanchuma* the 'voice' that was heard in Pharaoh's house was that of Judah who, on hearing Joseph's revelation, 'cried out with such a terrible voice that all the walls of Egypt fell down, every beast was cowed, Joseph fell from his throne and Pharaoh too descended from his throne.'

The word *in* is not in the Hebrew but *Rashi* maintains that it is implied in the phraseology which should be interpreted as if it read *בְּבֵית פַּרְעֹה*. Furthermore, in our passage *בֵּית*, house, is to be taken literally [unlike in v. 2 where it means household].

וְהָיוּ אִתּוֹ יוֹסֵף — Joseph's brothers have come.

— I.e., the honorable brothers that Joseph always claimed to have in Canaan from where he had been kidnapped. [As noted in 40:15, Joseph had always boasted that he was a Hebrew from a distinguished family, since he did not want to be taken as a Canaanite]. Now Joseph's story was confirmed by their arrival (*Ramban*).

However, only this was heard, but nothing about how they had sold him (*Alshich*).

וַיִּיטֵב בְּעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי עֲבָדָיו — And it pleased Pharaoh and his servants [lit. and it was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants].

It had been a disgrace for Egypt to be ruled by a stranger, a slave released from prison. Now when Pharaoh and his courtiers saw that

פֿרעה אל־יוסף אָמַר אל־אַחֶיךָ זֹאת
עֲשׂוּ טַעֲנוּ אֶת־בְּעִירְכֶם וְלָכוּ־בָאוּ אֶרֶצָה
יִחְכְּמוּ וְקָחוּ אֶת־אֲבִיכֶם וְאֶת־בְּתִיכֶם
וּבָאוּ אֵלַי וְאֶתְנֶה לָכֶם אֶת־טוֹב אֶרֶץ
רֹבְעִי יִטְּמוּ וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־חֶלֶב הָאָרֶץ: וְאֵתָה
צִוִּיתָה זֹאת עֲשׂוּ קְחוּ־לָכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ

Joseph had important brothers [who were descended from Abraham, the renowned 'prince of God' of whom Pharaoh himself had heard (*Lekach Tov*)] and was indeed worthy of having a royal position, they were naturally very pleased (*Ramban*).⁽¹⁾

According to *Sforno*, they rejoiced at the news of his brothers' arrival since henceforth Joseph would regard himself and his children as permanent residents of the country. No longer would he consider himself an alien; henceforth he would turn his full attention to the long-term best interests of the country.

17. וַיֹּאמֶר פֿרעה אֶל־יוֹסֵף — [And] Pharaoh said to Joseph.

Pharaoh's invitation that Joseph have his brothers return to Canaan to bring his family to Egypt was selfishly motivated. He was afraid that now that Joseph was reunited with his illustrious brothers, he might display a desire to return home with them, and leave Egypt without anyone competent to run the government (*Yalkut Reuveni*; *Meam Loez*).

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־אַחֶיךָ זֹאת עֲשׂוּ — Say to your brothers, 'Do this'.

I.e., 'Say to your brothers — in my name and by my authority as Pharaoh — *Do the following*.' They needed special royal permission to take along the wagons, since in those days wagons and chariots were used only by kings and in time of war; no one else could use them without the king's personal permission (*Abarbanel*; *Or HaChaim*).

טַעֲנוּ אֶת בְּעִירְכֶם — Load up your animals.

— With grain (*Rashi*).

The translation of טַעֲנוּ as load up follows *Rashi*, *Onkelos*, and general Talmudic usage; *Ibn Janach* and *Ralbag* concur. *Radak* in *Shorashim* cites this as his primary interpretation, but in an alternate translation [followed by *Tur*, and similar to *R' Saadia Gaon*] relates it to the cognate term מְטַעֵן in *Isaiah* 14:19 where it means thrust through, the sense here being that Joseph wanted the brothers to goad [lit. stab] the animals [as with spurs] to make them hurry to the land of Canaan. [Cf. *Ibn Ezra* in *Isaiah* 14:19].

The term בעִיר meaning cattle, animal, beast is derived from the verb בָּעַר, destroy, since beasts utterly consume and destroy vegetation and verdure. Comp. the term in *Exodus* 22:4 and *Numbers* 20:4 (*Ibn Caspi*; see *R' Hirsch*).

וְלָכוּ־בָאוּ אֶרֶצָה כְּנָעַן — And go directly [lit. and go, come] to the land of Canaan.

— Without delay (*Lekach Tov*).

The word בָּאוּ, come, is superfluous,

1. *Midrash HaGadol* offers the following:

... And in the eyes of his servants' — but not of all his servants. They said, 'If this one [Joseph], who is but an individual, displaced us from our highest status, how much more so will these ten!' This is inferred in *Psalms* 105:38: Rejoice, O Egypt, in their departure. The Egyptians rejoiced in their departure, but not at their entrance.

"Say to your brothers, 'Do this: Load up your animals and go directly to the land of Canaan. ¹⁸ Bring your father and your households and come to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you will eat the fat of the land.' ¹⁹ And you are commanded [to say]: 'Do this: Take yourselves from the

as it would have sufficed to write לָכוּ וּלְכוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, and go to the land of Canaan. Most commentators perceive לָכוּ לְכוּ, go come, to be an idiomatic expression meaning go directly, without delay. Onkelos renders לָכוּ as synonymous with the transitive verb — הָבִיאוּ, bring. Joseph ordered them to go and bring grain to the land of Canaan. (See HaKsav V' HaKabbalah).

18. וְקָחוּ אִתָּם אֲבֹתָם וְאֶת־בְּתֻלָּתָם וְבָאוּ. — אלי — [And] bring [lit. take] your father and your households and come to me.

Pharaoh was thus instructing Joseph to emphasize the personal aspect of his family's descent to Egypt: 'To me, Joseph' (and not 'to the land'), for the primary reason you are to bring the family to this country is to be with me (*Alshich*). "Possibly, by the words *and come to me*, Pharaoh meant himself, as if Joseph were to suggest to Jacob, 'Come to Pharaoh, for he will give you the best of the land of Egypt' (*Akeidah*; *Abarbanel*).

וְאֶתֶּנָּה לָכֶם אֶת־טֹב אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם — And I will give you the best of the land of Egypt.

— The land of Goshen (*Rashi*).

Rashi continues that in saying I will give you the best of the land of Egypt "Pharaoh was prophesying but he did not know the significance of what he was saying. For ultimately [the Israelites] would make [Egypt] like a deep sea void of fish" מִצְרַיִם, i.e. despoiled; see comm. to וַיִּגְדְּלוּ in Exodus 12:36.]

[That is, Pharaoh unknowingly

prophesied that the Egyptians would indeed some day give the Israelites the best of the land of Egypt. For at the end of their long Exile in Egypt, the Israelites would go out with all the best the land had to offer, and would literally empty out the nation's treasures. This would be in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham [15:14] *Afterwards they shall leave with great possessions* (*Meam Loez*).]

וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־חֶלֶב הָאָרֶץ — And you will eat the fat of the land.

The word *fat* always denotes "the choicest" (*Rashi*).

19. וְאַתָּה צִוִּיתָה זֶאת עָשֹׂה — And you are commanded [to say]: 'Do this.'

The phrase is elliptical. It means: And you [Joseph] are commanded by me [Pharaoh] to tell them: 'Do this.' — for it is with my permission (*Rashi*).

Rashi thus tells us by whom Joseph was commanded [i.e. Pharaoh], and that עָשֹׂה *do*, is in plural, since it was not Pharaoh's instructions to Joseph, but to relay to his brothers (*Mizrachi*).

Pharaoh issued this as a royal decree because Joseph's integrity and honesty were such that Pharaoh knew Joseph would never abuse his high office for personal advantage [especially in this case since, as noted, the export of wagons from Egypt was prohibited], and that he therefore might not send his father anything. Therefore Pharaoh specifically commanded him to do the following (*Ramban*).

ויגש מזה-כ"א מִצְרִים עֲגֻלוֹת לִטְפָּכֶם וְלִנְשִׁיכֶם
 כ וּנְשֵׁאתֶם אֶת־אֲבִיכֶם וּבָאתֶם: וְעִינֹכֶם
 אֶל־תָּחֹס עַל־כְּלִיכֶם כִּי־טוֹב כָּל־אָרֶץ
 כא מִצְרִים לָכֶם הוּא: וַיַּעַשׂוּ־כֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

On the other hand, the *Zohar* [as explained by the commentators (see specifically *HaKsav V' HaKabalah*)] holds that the initiative to send wagons came from Joseph [as is implied from v. 27 below], and Pharaoh accommodated him by granting the needed royal decree. This is derived from the fact that the word *צִוִּיתָהּ* you are commanded ends with a ה (not *צִוִּיתָהּ*, the usual imperative form). This spelling implies that the phrase be interpreted *what you have commanded, they should do*.

As R' David Feinstein offers, Joseph arranged for the dispatch of the wagons to be done at his personal direction. The brothers would notice this and convey it to their father when they returned home. Hearing that Joseph sent the wagons, Jacob would understand the desired sign Joseph wished to convey by means of the wagons, as we shall learn in v. 27.

Targum Yonasan paraphrases: 'And you, Joseph, are commanded to honor your father. Therefore, tell your brothers, Do this ...' [That is, Pharaoh was apprehensive, now that the brothers were reunited, that out of filial devotion Joseph might want to go *personally* to his father. In order to prevent this, Pharaoh acknowledged Joseph's desire to honor his father, but he advised him that by personally telling his brothers to take wagons the idea will be attributed to him, and it will be considered as if he personally

performed the good deed (*Yayin HaTov*).]

קחו לכם מארץ מצרים עגלות לטפכם ונשיכם — *Take yourselves from the land of Egypt wagons for your small children and for your wives.*

The use and export of wagons was generally forbidden, and, as noted, was a limited privilege which could be granted only by Pharaoh himself — especially since the famine. Therefore Pharaoh prefaced this instruction by the formula *And you are commanded* (*Lekach Tov; Malbim*).

Comp. *Rashbam*: 'Now I am commanding you to take wagons and beasts to pull [them].' For no one was permitted to take a wagon out of the kingdom without Pharaoh's authority. An analogy to this law is found in the Talmud [*Mishnah Bechoros* 4:4; *Sanhedrin* 33a; 93a]: No cow or sow was permitted to leave Egypt without her womb being first removed [to ensure that she would not calve].

[The most common interpretation of the analogy is that just as fertile cows and sows could not be exported from Egypt, so could wagons not be exported. There are some, however, who suggest that *Rashbam* is interpreting *עגלות* (plural of *עגלה*, wagon) in this passage as the plural of *עגלה*, *heifer*, as if Pharaoh were granting Joseph's brothers permission to take *heifers* out of Egypt — something usually forbidden — and the analogy from the Talmud is cited in support for this interpretation. The former, more common interpretation, however, is the traditional and more acceptable one. See *Torah Sheleimah* 45 note 72, and *comm.* to v. 27.]

Chizkuni synthesizes both views and

45 land of Egypt wagons for your small children and for
20-21 your wives; transport your father and come. ²⁰ And
do not be concerned with your belongings for the
best of all the land of Egypt shall be yours.' "

²¹ The sons of Israel consented, and Joseph gave

postulates that heifers were to be harnessed to these wagons and it was for this reason that Pharaoh had to give his personal permission, for as noted, cows could not be exported from Egypt unless their wombs were removed; however, Pharaoh ordered that these heifers be whole.

[Pharaoh felt that if Jacob saw that wagons were sent for his use, he would have no excuse for delaying or refusing to come. And so, indeed, it happened. The sight of the wagons convinced Jacob to acquiesce (v. 27 below).]

וְנִשְׂאֵתֶם אֶת־אֲבִיכֶם וְיָאֵת — [And] transport [lit. raise; carry] your father and come.

To dwell here permanently (Maibim).

The verb נשא literally means carry. The implication of the verse is: Take wagons ... for your small children and for your wives, but carry your father — on your shoulders [as befits his honor; the wagons are not intended for him] — and come (Daas Zekeinim).

According to most commentators, however, it was clear that the wagons were intended in honor of Jacob (Abarbanel; Akeidah). [However, the Midrash maintains that the brothers did carry their father. See further 46:5.]

וְעֵינֶיכֶם אַל־תָּחֹס עַל־כֵּלֵיכֶם — And do not be concerned with your belongings [lit. and your eye be not compassionate upon your utensils].

I.e., do not be concerned about the belongings that you will have to leave behind in the land of Canaan, since you will be able to transport

only part of your movable property (Ralbag) ...

Joseph knew that Jacob was very particular about his possessions, for as the Sages note in 32:25, Jacob had been concerned in a time of danger even for some earthenware jugs that he had left behind. He therefore cautioned that Jacob not let concern over his belongings delay his descent to Egypt (Daas Zekeinim).

When people move far away they usually begin selling their household goods half a year in advance in order to receive a good price. I am advising you, however, not to procrastinate in Canaan awaiting buyers for your property. You do not have to do this, since the best of the land of Egypt shall be yours (Me'am Loez).

— Do not delay because of your belongings; if you delay, many of your cattle [your belongings] will die of famine (Sforno).

כִּי טוֹב כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לָכֶם הוּא — For the best of all the land of Egypt shall be yours. [See on v. 18].

[It has been noted that Jacob and his family came to Egypt at the express invitation of the king. There was even a promise of good treatment to the immigrants as guests of the State, which one of their family had saved. This good treatment was not to last, however. The Providential Plan would later require a different course of events.]

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־בָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל — The sons of Israel consented [lit. did so; comp. this meaning in 29:28 and 42:21].

They agreed to return with their

ויגש מה/כב"כג ויתן להם יוסף עגלות על-פי פִּרְעָה
 בב ויתן להם צדה לדרך: לכלם נתן לאיש
 חלפות שמלת ולבנימן נתן שלש מאות
 כג כסף וחמש חלפות שמלת: ולאביו שלח

father as soon as possible (*Malbim*).

Or: And they did so, i.e., they loaded their animals as they were instructed (*Radak*).

— ויתן להם יוסף עגלות על-פי פִּרְעָה —
 And he [Joseph] gave them wagons by Pharaoh's word [lit. mouth].

This is emphasized because, as noted several times above, without Pharaoh's permission no wagons could be exported from Egypt (*Or HaChaim*).

— ויתן להם צדה לדרך [And] he also gave them provisions for the journey.

Apparently in addition to the grain which they were to load onto their beasts (*Akeidah*).

22. לכלם נתן לאיש חלפות שמלת —
 To each of them he gave changes of clothing. [The translation follows *Radak*. The Hebrew literally reads: To all of them he gave to the man changes of clothing.]

I.e., two sets of clothing — two being the minimum of the plural term (*Ibn Ezra*). He gave them very elegant garments, the intention being that everyone should realize that they were distinguished people, and brothers of the viceroy (*R' Avraham b. HaRambam*).

Since they had rent their garments in grief when they were accused of having stolen Joseph's goblet [44:13], Joseph now gave

them changes of garments (*Riva* citing *R' Tam*).

According to *HaKsav V'HaKabalah* the term חלפות refers to braided or finely woven garments which were an Egyptian specialty. Since they were very expensive only the nobility wore them. See the term מקהלות in *Judges* 16:19; cf. also the textile skills of the Egyptians, alluded to in *Proverbs* 7:16; *Isaiah* 19:9.

ולבנימן נתן שלש מאות כסף וחמש חלפות שמלת — But to Benjamin he gave three hundred [pieces of] silver and five changes of clothing.

The Sages in the *Talmud* [*Megillah* 16b] ask: How could Joseph have fallen into the same snare that caused his father so much grief, by giving Benjamin such preferential treatment that his brothers would be jealous? It was just this kind of jealousy over 'two ounces of fine wool' [alluding to the fine woolen garment Jacob had given to Joseph] that provoked his brothers to sell him, thereby triggering the chain of events that culminated in the family's descent into Egypt and the Egyptian Exile.

The *Gemara* answers that Joseph's motive was prophetically inspired. Joseph intimated thereby that one of Benjamin's descendants, Mordechai, would one day go forth from the royal palace attired in five kingly garments [see *Esther* 8:15].^[1]

Maharsha notes that the *Gemara*

1. The *Vilna Gaon* in *Sh'nos Eliyahu* poses the obvious question: since the brothers did not know that the gift of clothing was a prophetic allusion to Mordechai, how did this minimize the envy of his brothers? He suggests that each of the garments given Benjamin was worth only a fifth of those given the other brothers; therefore, his five were equal to each of theirs in

45 them wagons by Pharaoh's word. He also gave them
22-23 provisions for the journey. ²² To each of them he gave changes of clothing; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of clothing. ²³ And to his father he sent the following:

focuses this interpretation specifically on the garments, but not on Joseph's substantial gifts of money to Benjamin. Since garments are worn publicly, every time Benjamin wore them it would be an implied rebuke to the brothers, as if to say that Joseph loved Benjamin but hated the brothers who sold him. But they had no objection to a gift of money, because Joseph was entitled to show special affection to his only maternal brother in a private manner.¹¹

23. וְלֹאֲבִיר שְׁלַח בָּרָאָה — And to his father he sent the following.

[The Hebrew literally reads: And to his father he sent like this. The word בָּרָאָה, like this, appears on the surface to be somewhat superfluous

since the passage could have read: And to his father he sent ten he-donkeys etc. without the word בָּרָאָה.]

Rashi suggests that the implication of the passage is elliptic: 'And to his father he sent according to this amount' [בְּחֶשְׁבֹן הַזֶּה].

Ramban disagrees that the feminine form בָּרָאָה could allude to the masculine noun חֶשְׁבֹן amount; had that been the allusion, the masculine form בָּרָאָה would have been used. [Mizrachi defends Rashi by stating that Rashi was concerned only with the phrase's general implication. Rashi's point is that Joseph's gift to Jacob was independent of his above-mentioned gifts to the brothers. Thus the word בָּרָאָה is under-

value and gave no cause for envy since this made it apparent that Joseph's gift was symbolic (see also Eitz Yosef; Iyun Yaakov).

Torah Temimah finds homiletical Scriptural support for this thesis in the verse. In the case of the brothers the word חֲלִמָה [changes] is spelled 'fully,' while in the case of Benjamin it is spelled 'defectively' — חֲלִמָה — thus alluding to the 'inferior' worth of each of Benjamin's garments.

Regarding pieces of silver, however, Torah Temimah cites R' Bachya that the three hundred silver pieces Joseph gave Benjamin were equal to the sum that the brothers were liable to for having sold him. That is, the average value of a slave is deemed to be thirty shekels (see Exodus 21:32), and the Talmud [Gittin 449] rules that one who sells his slave to a heathen (thereby removing him from performance of mitzvot) can be penalized and forced to redeem him for as much as ten times his value, that is, ten times thirty shekels = 300 pieces of silver.

Torah Temimah elaborates: By law each of the brothers should have given Joseph 300 pieces of silver. Joseph however did not take it from them, and instead gave Benjamin — who was not present at the sale and was not obligated for this amount — a like sum.

Thus it emerges that by forfeiting the penalty from each of the ten brothers, it is as if he gave them each 300 pieces of silver; therefore, they were not envious when Benjamin received that sum, since it equalized the compensation granted all of them. [Cf. Chizkuni, and Chidash in Nachal Kedumim.]

As for additional reasons for the choice of the number five, R' Munk writes, the Midrashim explain it in the way Rashi quoted on 43:34 explained the five portions Joseph had set in front of Benjamin: 'Benjamin was given his own portion, equal to that of his brothers, but in addition, he was given portions by Joseph, Asenath, Manasseh and Ephraim' (Midrash HaChefetz). The Midrash Sechel Tov notes that five was Joseph's favorite number: Let the country be divided into five parts (41:34): You will give one fifth to Pharaoh (47:24). R' Bachya (on 46:4) explains at length Joseph's preference for the number five and relates it to the letter ה (with a numerical value of five), which is the sign of the Divine Name.

ויגש
מה/כר

כֹּזֶאת עֲשָׂהָ חֲמֵרִים נְשָׂאִים מְטוֹב
מִצָּרִים וְעֶשֶׂר אֲתֹנֹת נְשָׂאוֹת בָּר וְלֶחֶם
בְּר וּמִזֶּן לֶאֱבִיו לְדֶרֶךְ: וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-אֲחִיו
וַיֵּלְכוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֶל-תִּרְגִּזוּ בְּדֶרֶךְ:

stood in the sense of 'as follows'; *Rashi* used the term *תשובון* only to illustrate his explanation.]

Ramban suggests that the elliptical meaning is: *And to his father he sent according to this gift* [כֹּזֶאת הַמִּתְּחָה], i.e., *he sent the following gift: ten he-donkeys*, etc., the word כֹּזֶאת being understood as if it read זאת *this*, the כ being superfluous, as in the phrase הָאֵלֶּה נִדְבָרִים [24:28; *Daniel* 10:15; see *Ramban* to 39:17-19].

Ramban continues that the term כֹּזֶאת may mean 'the same thing,' implying that just as Joseph gave each of his brothers a generous gift of provisions for the way, he sent the same gift to his father. Then the verse lists the *additional gifts* he sent Jacob.

According to *Maharshah*, *Rashi's* intent in his comment כֹּזֶאת הַמִּתְּחָה, 'according to this amount,' is that the expression כֹּזֶאת, like *this*, means the equivalent of. That is, Joseph loaded the wagons with the *equivalent* of the loads of ten he- and she-donkeys, not the animals themselves, for we do not find these animals mentioned later, only the wagons.

According to *Ibn Ezra*: He sent like *this* — i.e., the finest garments obtainable in Egypt, similar to the clothing he gave his brothers.

Sforno likewise interprets: And to his father he sent 'like this,' i.e. a gift similar to the aforementioned gift given Benjamin. In addition to this he also sent ten he-donkeys ... and ten she-donkeys. Thus, our passage would have the same meaning as if it read: And to his father he sent gifts similar to those he gave the brothers, [and he also sent him] ten he-donkeys ... and ten she-donkeys ... *Abarbanel* interprets similarly. [Although one would therefore expect the phrase *ten he-donkeys* to be preceded by the conjunction ו, and, this presents no problem,

for] it is usual for a conjunction to occur at the end of a group of clauses, as for example וַיִּשְׁכֶּר וַיִּבֹּל וַיִּנָּמֶן, *Issachar, Zevulun and Benjamin* [*Exodus* 1:2].

— עֲשָׂהָ חֲמֵרִים נְשָׂאִים מְטוֹב מִצָּרִים — *Ten he-donkeys laden with the best of Egypt.*

According to the Talmud [*Megillah* 16b] Joseph sent old wine, which pleases the aged [as it warms their blood and stimulates circulation (*Maharsha*)]. The Midrash mentions that he sent him split peas [which were unique to Egypt, and as implied in *Yerushalmi Yoma* 1:39a were also supposed to exercise a soothing effect on people (Joseph's intention being to soothe his aged father from the shock he would experience at learning that Joseph was still alive)] (*Rashi*).

Joseph chose the number ten because it was known that Jacob had once made a vow to dedicate to God a tenth of whatever came into his possession [28:22] and Joseph therefore wanted to simplify the calculations: All Jacob need do is dedicate one of the ten (*Rosh*).

וְעֶשֶׂר אֲתֹנֹת נְשָׂאוֹת בָּר וְלֶחֶם וּמִזֶּן לֶאֱבִיו לְדֶרֶךְ — *And ten she-donkeys laden with grain, [and] bread, and food for his father for the journey.*

The Torah mentions that he sent both males and females as was the custom. Jacob had done the same in his gift to Esau [32:16] (*Ramban*).

בר refers to the five species of grain (*Onkelos*; *R' Bachya*; *Ibn Ezra*). In 41:35 the commentators explain that it is derived from בָּר, *bar*,

ten he-donkeys laden with the best of Egypt and ten she-donkeys laden with grain, bread, and food for his father for the journey. ²⁴ And he sent off his brothers, and they went. He said to them, "Do not become agitated on the way."

sift, and refers to winnowed and sifted fine grain. According to Radak, however, it refers to fodder, while לחם — which Rashi and most commentators interpret literally as bread — refers, to sifted grain fit for humans.

[When it occurs by itself, the term קֶזֶן (lit. nourishment) refers specifically to the five species of grain (wheat, barley, rye, oats and spelt), which both nourish and sustain (Rashi to Erubin 30a s.v. קֶזֶן; comp. Gemara there and Torah Temimah.)] In our verse [since כֶּרֶם, grain (following Onkelos) and לחם, bread have already been mentioned], Rashi explains the term to refer to לֶחֶם, foods that are eaten together with bread. Ralbag interprets similarly.

According to Radak, קֶזֶן refers to any human food, such as dates and other delicacies, besides wheat. Similarly, Ibn Ezra interprets that קֶזֶן in our verse refers to peas, white beans, lentils, millet, spelt, figs, raisins and dates. Except for grain and barley [which have already been mentioned] these are the only foods referred to as קֶזֶן [nutrients].

24. וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־אֶחָיו וַיָּלֶכּוּ — And he sent off his brothers, and they went.

The term וַיִּשְׁלַח, sent off, denotes that he escorted them a short distance, as is the etiquette of a host to his departing guests (Akeidah; Rashbam; comp. this meaning of שִׁלַּח in 12:20; 18:16; 24:59; 37:14).

According to Sefer HaYashar,

Joseph accompanied them all the way to the Egyptian border to see them off.

Sforno interprets: He dismissed them and granted them leave. Compare 32:27: Let me go [שְׁלַחְנִי] for דָּרְוֹן has broken; 24:56: Send me [שְׁלַחְנִי] and I will go to my master.

The consensus of commentators maintain that all eleven brothers — including Benjamin — returned to Jacob, and Judah thereby fulfilled his vow to bring back Benjamin — although as noted in the footnote to 43:9 [p. 1863] his vow was never formally abrogated, and technically remained in force.

There are opinions in the Midrash, however [see for example Pesikta Zutresa], that Benjamin stayed behind with Joseph. That is the reason Joseph sent ten laden animals — one with each of the ten brothers. Following this view, had all the brothers returned, Joseph would presumably have sent eleven animals. [Cf. Rosh, however.]

According to those who maintain that Benjamin did return, Joseph did not want to burden him with the care of pack animals.

Or HaChaim defends the view that Joseph sent Benjamin back by noting how in v. 12, in urging them to report to Jacob on his great status in Egypt, Joseph said, 'Behold, your eyes see as well as the eyes of my brother Benjamin', thus relying on Benjamin's testimony to convince Jacob.

וַיִּאָמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֶל־תִּרְגְּזוּ בְּדֶרֶךְ — He said to them, "Do not become agitated on the way."

Rashi interprets the word רָגַז as quarrel; anger; agitation, and offers three interpretations of our passage,

ויגש מה-כה-כו כה ויעלו ממצרים ויבאו ארץ כנען אל- יעקב אביהם: ויגדו לו לאמר עוד יוסף

the first two being based on *Taanis* 10b and the last being his interpretation of the simple meaning of the passage:

a) Do not become involved in halachic discussion [matter] lest the road become 'angry' at you [a figurative expression, meaning: lest you become so engrossed that you lose your way].⁽¹⁾

[According to this interpretation the phrase would be rendered homiletically: *Do not be angered by the road*, i.e., do not become so 'agitated' in intense halachic dispute that the road will 'anger' you, in the sense that you will lose your way, making the trip take longer than necessary; see *Mizrachi* and commentators].

Rashi's comment, as noted, is based on the Talmudic text in *Taanis* 10b. The implication, following all commentators, is certainly not that Joseph was cautioning them against discussing Torah study along the way, since it is clear from *Deut.* 6:7 וְכָל־כֶּתֶךְ ... וְכָל־כֶּתֶךְ ... that it is a *mitzvah* to discuss Torah at all times – even on the road, and the *Gemara* there severely condemns scholars who do not discuss Torah while they travel. [Comp. also the Mishnah in *Avos* 3:9 which indicates that one must not interrupt his studies on a

journey]. Rather, as is evident from the phraseology in the Talmud, *Rashi* explains that Joseph was cautioning them not to engage in deep, difficult concepts which can provoke disagreement and cause them to lose their way but should rather focus on simple subjects, which would not provoke dissension.

This might be the implication of *Midrash Rabbah's* parallel interpretation of our passage which reads differently: 'Do not refrain from words of Torah.' The intent, as explained by the commentators, is that Joseph was cautioning them not to neglect Torah study – even though they were rushing to Canaan at his request – since they would be endangering themselves by such neglect, as is evident from the Talmudic citations above. At the same time, however, he warned them against intensive study, which leads to debate and could cause them to lose their way entirely. [See *Maharsha* to *Gemara*; *Matnas Kehunah* and *Maharzu* to *Midrash*, and *Divrei David*].

b) Do not take long strides [i.e., although you are in a great haste to return with this news to Father, it is unhealthy to rush too much. As the Sages proclaimed, long strides decrease a man's eyesight by one five-hundredth part]. Moreover, enter the town where you will lodge

1. The Halachic dilemma.

What inspired, according to the Talmudic interpretation cited by *Rashi*, Joseph's worry at this juncture in particular that his brothers might become so involved in Halachic dispute as to affect their very safety during the journey? If such a problem was to be expected, why didn't Jacob caution them about such a thing when they left Canaan?

Joseph apparently realized that he had presented them with a profound Halachic dilemma: Do they have a right to abandon *Eretz Yisrael* because of the famine? On one hand, they could have reasoned [as the Halachah is cited in *Bava Basra* 91a] that it is permissible to leave *Eretz Yisrael* during a famine only when produce is unobtainable, but Jacob's family could make arrangements to obtain provisions from Joseph. On the other hand, they might be required to remain only if food is obtainable within *Eretz Yisrael*, but if produce is available only from abroad, they are permitted to leave.

Moreover, the very notion of leaving *Eretz Yisrael* confronted them with a quandary of the most serious dimensions. As *Ramban* [2:10] observes, Abraham sinned by leaving *Eretz Yisrael* in the face of famine; he should have trusted that God would provide for him. In punishment for this act, according to *Ramban*, since Abraham sinned by going to Egypt, the Egyptian Exile was decreed upon his descendants. Possibly, it was for this very reason that Jacob did not descend to Egypt until expressly directed by God to do so. This was the sort of halachic discussion that could have caused intense contention among the brothers and against which Joseph cautioned them (*Yalkut Yehudah*).

overnight while the sun is still shining [i.e., despite your haste, do not travel late into the night, since this would expose you to robbers].

According to the latter, which follows the Talmud and Midrash, the passage is understood in the following sense: *Do not become agitated on account of the journey.* That is, do not regard the journey as a cause of annoyance, so that, in order to reach our father as soon as possible with the good news, you proceed too quickly or travel into the night before resting. [There is no need to hurry; everything has its destined moment from Heaven, and is not to be delayed or hurried (R' Menachem Mendel of Kotzk).]

Moreover, Joseph's instruction that they enter the town before sunset follows the dictum of R' Yehudah citing Rav: A man should always set out on a journey in daylight and enter a town while it is still light [see *comm.* to 44:3].

Gur Aryeh emphasizes that these Midrashic interpretations are inspired by the use of the term רגז *anger, agitation*, instead of the term ריב *strife*, which would be used if only explanation "c" were intended. The former term intimates many kinds of agitations — including those provoked by intellectual disagreement or unpleasant travel conditions, and therefore Rashi cites these Talmudic-Midrashic interpretations not as homiletical, but as reflecting also the simple meaning (*p'shat*) of the passage.

c) According to the 'plain' sense of the passage, however, Joseph feared that the brothers would quarrel with each other about responsibilities for his sale and engage in mutual recrimination. One would accuse the other saying, 'It was because of you that he was sold'; and the other would respond, 'It was you who made slanderous statements about him and caused us

to hate him!' He therefore cautioned them against quarreling on the way. [Ibn Ezra and most commentators follow this latter interpretation.]

Ramban interprets רגז to mean *fear*, as in the expression לב רגז *a trembling heart* [Deut. 28:65]; ורגזו [Habakkuk 3:16]; ברגזו [Ezekiel 12:18]. He renders: *Do not fear on the road.* Joseph meant to reassure them that they could travel without fear even though they were heavily laden with 'grain, bread and food' and the best of Egypt. In times of famine they could be expected to fear attack by robbers on their way to Canaan and certainly on their return to Egypt with all their possessions. As a result they might delay their move. Joseph assured them that such fears are unfounded because they would be traveling under his aegis. Since he was the ruler of Egypt, and the entire region was dependent on him and in awe of him, the brothers could expect to travel and arrive in peace. [Rashbam and Daas Zekeinim interpret similarly.]

25. The brothers tell Jacob that Joseph is alive.

וַיַּעֲלוּ מִמִּצְרָיִם — They went up from Egypt.

Because Eretz Yisrael is more elevated than other countries, it says *They 'went up' from Egypt.*

Many perceive the implication to refer to the higher spiritual degree of Eretz Yisrael. See Zohar cited in footnote to 13:1.

וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֶל־יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם — And [they] came to the land of Canaan, to Jacob their father.

The land of Canaan is mentioned

ויגש
מה/כו
חִי וְכִי־הוּא מֶשֶׁל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּפֹּג
כּו לְבֹו בִי לֹא־הָאֵמִין לָהֶם: וַיִּדְּבְרוּ אֵלָיו
אֶת כָּל־דְּבָרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהִים

first. Since they knew they would soon be separated from the Holy Land, they yearned greatly for it. Under these circumstances, the *land of Canaan* was their primary destination, and Jacob was in a sense secondary. Compare above 42:29 where the reverse was the case (*Haamek Davar*).

26. וַיִּגְדּוּ לוֹ לֵאמֹר — *And they told him, saying.*

The word וַיִּגְדּוּ is written defectively (without the letter י). This implies a 'defect' in the telling: the brothers did not tell him themselves but had the wonderful news announced by someone else: לֵאמֹר, in the sense of *to have it said*. They were apprehensive that suddenly announcing so extraordinary a surprise would affect the health of their aged father (*Midrash; Zohar*).⁽¹⁾

חִי וְכִי־הוּא — *"Joseph is still alive."*

Possibly, to break the news to Jacob gently and gradually, the brothers [or their emissary] first said that Simeon and Benjamin returned safely, and then told him that Joseph was alive and well. In this case עֹד [still] would have its other meaning of *moreover*, as if

they said, '... moreover [i.e. not only are Simeon and Benjamin safe, but] Joseph is alive!' (*Or HaChaim*).

וְכִי הוּא מֶשֶׁל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם — *Also that he was ruler over all the land of Egypt.*

— So Jacob should not have qualms about going to him (*Ramban*).

Following the implication of *Rashi*, this is not part of the direct quote 'Joseph is still alive.' The verse now tells us what else they said to Jacob.

וַיִּפֹּג לְבֹו בִי לֹא־הָאֵמִין לָהֶם — *But [lit. and] his heart rejected [it] for he could not believe them.*

This is the fate of a liar: He is disbelieved even when he tells the truth! Jacob originally believed them when they came and showed him Joseph's blood-stained tunic, suggesting thereby that a wild beast had devoured him; but now he did not believe them even though they were telling the truth (*Avos d'Rabbi Nosson; Midrash*).

According to the above, *for he did not believe them* is not limited to this instance. Rather, the implication of the passage is that he had not believed them for a long time.

1. Serach daughter of Asher breaks the news to Jacob.

Sefer HaYashar relates that as the brothers were nearing home and discussing the problem, they saw Serach, the daughter of Asher. Full of spiritual charm, she played the harp beautifully. They greeted her and asked her to go and play for their father Jacob and to sing the words that they would tell her. So she went and sat before her grandfather Jacob and sang the following refrain to beautiful music accompanied by the soothing melody of her harp: עֹד יוֹסֵף, 'Joseph, my uncle, is still alive. He rules the whole of Egypt for he is not dead.'

As she repeated this refrain over and over again, Jacob began to listen to it and became deeply moved. He felt an intense joy and little by little his spirits began to revive. Since being separated from Joseph he had lived in sadness, and prophetic inspiration had departed from him. But with Serach's touching words, his heart overflowed with immense happiness and he asked her to sing her song again.

'You have truly comforted me, dear Serach,' Jacob told her. 'As your reward, I pray that

saying, "Joseph is still alive," also that he was ruler over all the land of Egypt. But his heart rejected it for he could not believe them. ²⁷ However, when they related to him all the words that Joseph had spoken

They had lost their credibility with him and therefore his heart rejected them now, too (*Maharzu*).

The translation of נִקְבְּרוּ as *rejected* follows *Rashi* who interprets the phrase to mean: his heart 'changed' and he ceased to believe, i.e., he took no notice of their words. *Rashi* cites several Biblical and Talmudic passages to support this interpretation (*Beitzah* 14a; *Lamentations* 3:49; *Targum to Jeremiah* 48:11). [*Onkelos*; *Rashbam*; *Akeidas Yitzchak* and *Abarbanel* interpret similarly.]

Ramban cites these and other passages (*Lamentations* 2:18; *Habakuk* 1:4), but he maintains that the meaning [even in those passages] is *ceased*, the implication here being that Jacob's heart momentarily stopped beating.

In *Ramban's* words, '... The books of medicine mention that old or feeble people cannot withstand the shock of sudden joy, for many of them faint when joy comes to them suddenly ... their body temperature lowers and they fall in a swoon ... Jacob fainted and lay in this state much of the day because he did not believe them. They eventually revived him by shouting in his ear what Joseph had said to accustom him to the joy and they brought the wagons before him, until he revived and accepted the news calmly ...' [*Ramban in comm. to Mishnah Yoma* 1:7 similarly interprets

נִקְבְּרוּ to mean *dispel coolness*].

Akeidas Yitzchak and *Abarbanel* disagree with *Ramban's* interpretation on several counts: see *Kesef Mezukak* cited by *R' Chavel*, and *Shaarei Aharon*.

Other interpretations include:

Targum Yonasan: His heart was divided, because he did not believe them;

Radak: His heart became weakened at the memory of his son Joseph;

When they mentioned his beloved son Joseph over whom he agonized all these years, his yearning and grief resurfaced and his heart turned within him as his grief was renewed, draining him of all his strength (*Akeidas Yitzchak*);

Chizkuni: His heart became numb and he did not react because he did not believe them until he saw the wagons [cf. *Ibn Ezra*].

נִקְבְּרוּ אֵלָיו אֶת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יוֹסֵף — *However, when [lit. and; the translation however when is suggested by the syntax and the compound conversive verbs נִקְבְּרוּ and נִיָּרָא] they related [lit. spoke] to him all the words that Joseph had spoken to them [lit. all Joseph's words that he had spoken to them].*

By 'all the words' the intent is

death never conquer you.' And this blessing came true. Serach never knew death. She was still alive in King David's time. She was one of the righteous individuals who entered alive into Paradise [*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*; *Targum Yonasan* on 47:17; *Rashi* on *II Samuel* 20:19; *R' Munk*]. While Jacob was speaking with her, the brothers entered the room. They stood before him in their magnificent garments and exclaimed: 'There is wonderful news! Our brother Joseph is still alive and he is governor over the land of Egypt!' Even though Jacob had been prepared emotionally for the news, the news was so unexpected that Jacob still could not believe it.

According to other Midrashic sources, see *comm.* to 49:21, the brothers had dispatched the fleet-footed Naftali to tell their aged father the good news. [However, as *R' Kaplan* points out in his translation of *Me'am Loez*, Naftali apparently did not go in to see Jacob until his brothers arrived and transmitted the message through Serach.]

[This was the *de-facto* annulment by the brothers of their *cherem* (ban) against revealing Joseph's whereabouts to their father Jacob. See footnote to 37:28.]

that they repeated Joseph's verbatim message in verses 9-11, *So said your son Joseph: God has made me master of all Egypt. Come down to me please; do not delay ... so you become impoverished, you, your household and all that is yours.* However, they did not repeat that it was they who sold him (R' Bachya) [see footnote].¹¹

They also reported on their meeting with Joseph: their weeping and how he identified himself beyond doubt (*Ibn Caspi; Rashbam*).

Following *Ramban*: They kept shouting Joseph's message to accustom him to its happy import ... until he could accept it with a tranquil heart ...

☞ The sign of the Eglah Arufah

Moreover, to convince their disbelieving father that it was Joseph who sent these messages, they presented further evidence, repeating that Joseph had given them a special directive to bring wagons, since Joseph had given them a sign which would provide Jacob with certain proof of his identity: When Joseph had left Jacob, they had been studying the topic of *eglah arufah* [the heifer whose neck was broken in expiation of an unsolved murder (see *Deut. 21:1-9* and *Tanchuma Yashan/Daas Zekeinim* cited

below)]. Therefore it is written [further in this verse], *And he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent*, and it does not say, ... that *Pharaoh* had sent [see *comm.* below] (*Rashi*).

This exposition is based on the fact that the Hebrew word for wagon, עֲגָלָה, is similar to the word עֲגֻלָּה meaning *heifer* (both words are spelled the same in Hebrew). Joseph's sign was that the brothers were to emphasize that he had sent *agalos*, wagons, the mention of which would evoke in Jacob the memory of '*eglah arufah*' — the topic he was studying with Joseph when they last saw each other — a fact only Joseph could have known.

The above is the view of the commentators on *Rashi*. According to the Midrash, however, Joseph told the brothers specifically to verbally remind Jacob that they had been learning the halachah of *eglah arufah*, and the wagons would constitute a symbolic 'proof' of this. In the words of the Midrash: Joseph said, "If Father believes you, fine; but if not, tell him in my name: 'When I left you, was I not engaged in studying with you the chapter of *eglah arufah*?' " Therefore it says, *and he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent ...* " [i.e., he perceived the significance of the wagons that Joseph had sent].

1. Did the brothers ever tell Jacob that they had sold Joseph?

In relating Joseph's messages of verses 9-13, the brothers make no reference to having sold him as a slave or to the sequence of events that brought him to Egypt. *Ramban* maintains that Jacob was never told that the brothers had sold Joseph. Instead, he thought that Joseph had lost his way in the countryside and was abducted by strangers who sold him into Egypt. The brothers scrupulously kept their crime secret, afraid that if Jacob became aware of it he would angrily curse them as he did Reuben, Simeon and Levi [see further 49:3-7]. Joseph, too, maintained his high ethical standard by remaining silent to spare his father and brothers grief.

It would appear from several inferences in *Rashi*, however, following the Talmud and Midrash, that Jacob was aware of the truth and suspected some of the brothers. See *Rashi* to 49:9 and 50:16.

There is also a view that Joseph did not communicate privately with his father all 17 of his father's last years in Egypt lest his father discover how he got to Egypt. [See *comm.* to 48:1-2.]

Tanchuma Yashan and *Daas Zekeinim* record that when Jacob sent Joseph to his brothers [37:15], Jacob escorted him part of the way. Joseph told Jacob to return home, but he refused, saying, "My son, it is important to accompany someone who is taking leave, as an entire section in the Torah is devoted to it [Deut. 21:1-9]. For, if a slain man is found in the open country and the murderer is unknown, the law requires the elders of the nearest town to slay a young heifer in an uncultivated valley by breaking its neck. Then they are to testify that they neither shed the victim's blood nor saw it shed, and pray for forgiveness. But could it ever occur to anyone to suspect the elders of murder? No! By this avowal the elders of the town declare, 'He did not come to us hungry and we let him go unfed ... he did not come to us friendless and we let him go unescorted.' For, had they indeed not escorted him, Scripture would have equated it with shedding blood." Jacob therefore insisted on escorting Joseph and took this opportunity to teach him the lesson of *eglah arufah*, the memory of which Joseph recalled by sending the *agalos*.

[The commentators delve extensively into the connection Jacob was supposed to make between the wagons he saw and the assonance of the Hebrew words *agalos* and *eglos*. Opinions vary widely. At one extreme, Joseph sent *only* wagons; at the other, the word in our narrative does not mean *wagons* but actual *heifers*, or that the wagons were drawn by *heifers* and that the heifers constituted the appropriate sign. For further research in this topic, see *Gur Aryeh*; *Yafeh Toar*; *Rosh*; *Minchas Yitzchak*; *Hadar Zekeinim*; see also note to *Torah Sheleimah* 191; and *Rashbam* and *Chizkuni* cited above v. 19 s.v. לקחו לכם.]

[My brother-in-law, R' Yaakov Kiffel, reports hearing that Jacob's teaching about *eglah arufah* at that very juncture was prophetic, although Jacob did not realize it at the time. The law of *eglah arufah* presup-

poses a moral responsibility that elders and leaders have for each of their subjects. When a foul deed is perpetrated it is symbolic of a laxity on the part of the elders of the closest town, and the leaders must therefore symbolically disavow the community's guilt. This was the lesson that the future viceroy of Egypt was taught during his last moments with his father. However, cf. the account recorded in the *Zohar*.]

וַיֵּרָא אֶת־הָעֲגֻלֹת אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לְשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ — And he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to transport him.

Following the Midrashic interpretation cited by *Rashi*: he perceived the symbolism of the wagons [*agalos*] as alluding to the *eglah arufah*. The word וַיֵּרָא, *saw*, denoting [prophetic] perception occurs also above in 42:1: "Jacob perceived that there was 'provision' in Egypt" [see *comm.* there] (*Mizrachi*; *Tzeidah laDerech*).

It was then, as the verse proceeds to tell us, that Jacob believed them and his soul was revived.

In a non-Midrashic sense, *Tur* explains that Jacob believed them only after seeing the wagons because how else could they possibly have come back with wagons loaded with Egypt's best were it not by special royal command? For, as *Akeidas Yitzchak* emphasizes, it was well-known that wagons could not be exported from Egypt without royal authority. Thus, the wagons were absolute proof that they must have been telling the truth — especially since, as the *Sages* record, they transmitted certain 'signs' from Joseph.

Obvious questions arise: Was it not *Pharaoh* who ordered the wagons to be sent [v. 21]? Why does this verse attribute the wagons to Joseph?

According to the *Zohar*, *Pharaoh* gave the command only in response to

ויגש
מה/כח כח חמישי
לשאת אתו ותחי רוח יעקב אביהם:
וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב עֲדֵי-יוֹסֵף בְּנֵי חַי

Joseph's request. [Therefore, our verse attributes the act to Joseph to allude to his special purpose in sending these wagons. Later, in 46:5, *Pharaoh* is mentioned once again as the 'sender' since it was exclusively by his authority that the wagons could be exported from Egypt, and the variance of 'senders' in the two passages draw our attention to this exposition (*Yafeh Toar*).]

According to the Midrash, however, the reason Joseph is mentioned here as the sender is that these particular wagons were not the same ones Pharaoh had sent. As recorded in the Midrash, Pharaoh's wagons had an idol engraved on them — and Judah arose and burnt them. Joseph replaced them and therefore he is mentioned as the sender. [That *Pharaoh* is mentioned later as the sender is, as *Yafeh Toar* notes above, because it was by his royal decree that special permission to export wagons during the famine was obtained; he was the prime 'sender'.]

[To transport him is the contextual meaning of the phrase לשאת אתו (lit. to lift him up). It is possible, that in the Midrashic context of these verses, the phrase might imply: Jacob perceived the significance of the wagons Joseph had sent to lift him up — i.e. to raise his spirits by the message they conveyed that Joseph was still alive. And so it was, for when Jacob perceived the implication of the gift, *Jacob's spirit was revived*.]

ותחי רוח יעקב אביהם — Then the spirit of their father Jacob was revived.

I.e., [he believed the joyous news, and] the Divine, prophetic, spirit which had left him during his grief, rested upon him again in his joy (*Rashi*; *Onkelos*; *Midrash*).

See *comm.* to ויברך in 37:35. See also *Rambam*, *Moreh Nevuchim* 2:36, who discusses the Talmudic

dictum that prophecy (i.e. the Divine Presence) comes neither during sadness nor gloom (*Shabbos* 30b), and observes that Jacob did not receive any revelation during this period since his mind was occupied with Joseph's loss and it affected his prophetic faculty. [Only after Jacob ceased his mourning and resumed his joy do we see that God communicated with him again (46:2).] Similarly, *Rambam ibid.* adds Moses did not receive any Divine revelation following the evil report of the Spies until the death of the entire generation of the desert (*Taanis* 30b), for he was in a state of depression, totally grieved by the enormity of their sin and the gravity of their punishment.

Ramban agrees with [*Rashi* and] *Onkelos'* interpretation of the passage [that *spirit* refers to the Divine Spirit]. He maintains that it reflects even the literal meaning, since the verse includes the word רוח, *spirit*. For had the verse referred only to the fact that Jacob's depression was lifted, it would have been sufficient to say, ויחי יעקב אביהם, *Jacob their father was revived*. Instead the verse tells us that his [*prophetic*] *spirit*, רוח, was revived.

Rashbam comments that Jacob believed the brothers now because he had always kept faith in the prophetic nature of Joseph's dreams. Then the spirit of their father Jacob was revived, for after hearing Joseph's youthful dreams Jacob 'kept the matter in mind' [37:11], believing that Joseph would eventually become a ruler, and because [such wagons] could not have left Egypt except by a ruler's decree as already explained [37:11; above v. 19].

[In his *comm.* on 37:11, *Rashbam* ex-

45 to transport him, then the spirit of their father Jacob
28 was revived.

28 And Israel said, "How great! My son Joseph still

plained that because of his faith in Joseph's dreams, Jacob did not fully assimilate the 'fact' of Joseph's death even though the blood-soaked tunic was powerful circumstantial evidence. This underlying faith in Joseph's survival enabled him to believe the seemingly impossible report that Joseph was alive and had attained greatness.]

According to the *Zohar*, the Divine Presence had departed from Jacob when the brothers made It a party to the oath of secrecy against revealing Joseph's whereabouts [see footnote to 37:28 (p. 1653-4)]. Now that the brothers, in effect, annulled the ban by revealing Joseph's whereabouts themselves, the Divine Presence was no longer 'bound' by their oath [if one may use such an expression], and It again rested on Jacob.

28. וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל — And Israel said.

During the period that the Divine Presence did not rest upon the Patriarch, he was referred to by his less exalted name, Jacob. But now that the Divine Presence rested upon him again, he is referred to as Israel, his title of spiritual nobility, grandeur, and power [see *comm.* to 32:29 and 35:10ff]. (*Zohar*).

1. A unique interpretation is offered in *Hadar Zekeinim*. Esau is described as רֹבֵד, the leader, in relation to Jacob, his younger brother: וְרֹבֵד יַעֲקֹב צֶעִיר, and the leader shall serve the younger (25:23). Although Jacob had received the Patriarchal blessings and although Rebecca had been given the prophecy that Jacob would be superior to Esau, Jacob could confront his powerful brother with confidence only if Joseph was present as the leading figure among the brothers.

As Scripture describes it, Joseph was like a flame that would consume the straw-like Esau (*Obadiah* v. 18). It was for this reason that Jacob first expressed his readiness to leave the safety of Laban's home only after Joseph was born (see *Rashi* to 30:25). With the disappearance and presumed death of Joseph, therefore, Esau surely gloated and Jacob must have feared for the future. But now Joseph was alive!

Hearing this, Jacob exulted as if he were directly addressing his sworn foe, Esau: רֹבֵד, O elder [brother] — Joseph my son is still alive! — The 'flame' that will one day consume you still burns bright. Do not rejoice, thinking that it has been extinguished! [See *Overview* to *Vayishev*.]

[See *comm.* to 46:2 s.v. *Jacob, Jacob*.]

רֹבֵד עוֹד יוֹסֵף בְּנִי הִי — How great! My son Joseph still lives! [11]

I.e., much joy and pleasure is still in store for me since my son Joseph is still alive! (*Rashi*).

Rashi is apparently referring to Jacob's apprehension [37:35] because he had been given an omen by God that if none of his sons died during his lifetime he may be assured that he would not see Gehinnom; and with Joseph thought to be dead, Jacob believed that he forfeited this assurance. Now however that he learned Joseph was alive, Jacob knew that much joy awaited him in the Hereafter. As the *Midrash* comments: I was foolish in losing hope, but now I am again confident that I have a portion טובָהּ, Your abundant goodness [see *Psalms* 31:20] (*Tzeidah LaDerech*).

Targum Yonasan, interpretively paraphrases Jacob's thought in this way: "Many are the blessings which God has bestowed upon me. He saved me from Esau, Laban, and the Canaanites who were persecuting me. I have had many joys and I hope to experience still others. But I had given up hope of ever setting eyes on Joseph again. Now I want to go and see him before I die."

Rashbam interprets רֹבֵד as enough: Enough! Joseph my son is still alive! —

ויגש מו/א-ב א אֶלְכָּה וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְטָרֵם אָמוֹת: וַיֵּסַע
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ וַיָּבֹא בְּאֶרֶץ שְׁבַע
ב וַיִּזְבַּח זִבְחִים לֵאלֹהֵי אָבִיו יִצְחָק: וַיֹּאמֶר

My disbelief in the truth of this wonderful news has lasted long enough! I am now truly convinced that indeed my son Joseph is alive! [Another interpretation is preserved in a marginal note in early manuscripts of *Rashbam*: *It is enough that my son Joseph is still alive*. Your news that he is the ruler of Egypt is unimportant to me; the fact that he is alive is sufficient, even without his being a ruler. (*Chizkuni* interprets similarly, as do *Malbim* and *Kli Yakar*).]

The *Midrash* perceives חַי, *alive*, to connote *alive in righteousness* [for 'only the righteous are truly "alive" (*Berachos* 18a)] and interprets: רַב, *great is the strength of my son; he experienced so many misfortunes and yet he has retained his righteousness*.

It was only after the Prophetic Spirit again rested on Jacob that he was able to make this pronouncement and entertain no further doubts (*Tiferes Shlomo-Radomsk*; *Haamek Davar*).

אֶלְכָּה וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְטָרֵם אָמוֹת — *I must go and see him before I die*.

I have no intention of *remaining* there; I am going neither to witness his greatness nor to have him support me; my sole purpose is to see him. The very connotation of the expression going to see someone, implies for but a short visit [cf. on *Exodus* 4:18] (*Sforino*; *Abarbanel*; *Malbim*; *Haamek Davar*).

It is a natural phenomenon that a person wishes to see his beloved and that he feels calmed and contented when he does so (*R' Shmuel b. Chofni*).¹¹

Furthermore, by gazing at him, Jacob in his wisdom could ascertain for himself the extent of Joseph's righteousness (*Yalkut Reuveni*). [See *Overview to Vayeishev*].

As *Alshich* explains, although Jacob prophetically sensed that Joseph had retained his righteousness in the most immoral country of that time, he could not rest until he had seen Joseph's face for himself. The Patriarchs could gaze upon the face of an individual and know — from the extent that he manifested the image of God — if he were righteous or not. Therefore, after meeting Joseph and seeing his face, Jacob could acclaim with certainty [46:30]: *for you are still חַי, alive* — you have indeed retained your righteousness! (*Alshich*).

[In another sense, Joseph's beauty and charisma were so profound that Jacob expresses a desire to see him. After finally meeting him after twenty-two years, Jacob's first words are (46:30): 'Now I can die; I have already seen your face for you are still alive.' That Joseph was an object of people's gazing also forms a basic theme in the Jacob's blessing in 49:22: בֶּן פֶּתַח יִוְסֵף, בֶּן פֶּתַח יוֹסֵף, *Joseph is a charming son, a charming son to the eye* — his charisma was so great that everyone wanted to look at him, yet the evil eye had no effect on him. Even in later times, the Talmud (*Zevachim* 118b) notes that the Tabernacle of Shiloh, in Joseph's territory, had the unique characteristic that offerings could be eaten even far away, as long as Shilo could be seen, unlike Jerusalem where the city walls were the

1. *Sefer HaYashar* records that when the inhabitants of Canaan heard that Joseph was still alive they came and rejoiced with Jacob, sharing his joy.

"Jacob made a three-day feast for them, and all the kings of Canaan and nobles of the land ate, drank, and rejoiced in the house of Jacob."

¹ So Israel set out with all that he had and he came to Beer Sheba. He slaughtered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

boundary. This was a reward to Joseph for his behavior with Potiphar's wife

when his eye would not enjoy what did not belong to him (see comm. to 49:22.)

XLVI

1. Jacob undertakes the journey to Joseph.

וַיֵּצֵא יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל-אֲשֵׁרֵלֵו — So [lit. and] Israel set out [lit. journeyed] [from Hebron (R' Shmuel ben Chofni)] with all that he had.

— With his entire household. Everyone wished to accompany him to see Joseph (Abarbanel).

[Jacob's sons were all grown men with their own families, so this

cohesiveness is to the family's credit. The verse emphasizes that when the aged Patriarch set out for Egypt, every one of his descendants went with him.]

וַיָּבֹא בְּאֶרֶץ שֶׁבַע — And he came to Beer Sheba.

Beer Sheba [28 miles southwest of Hebron] was the southernmost city on the border of Eretz Yisrael en-route to Egypt (Radak; Akeidah).^[1]

1. The Prominence of Beer Sheba.

[Beer Sheba was prominent in the lives of all the Patriarchs. As noted in the commentary to 22:19, Abraham resided there for twenty-six years following the destruction of Sodom. There, he made a treaty with Abimelech, gave the city its name (21:29), and located his *eshel* (21:33).

[Beer Sheba was Isaac's birthplace and it was the site of the great feast held to celebrate his weaning. Abraham had returned to his *eshel* in Beer Sheba to offer thanks for the miracle of the *akeidah*, even though Sarah resided in Hebron at the time. It was in Beer Sheba that he heard the news of Sarah's demise (see Ramban 23:3).

[When famine ravaged Eretz Yisrael (ch. 26), Isaac sought God's permission in Beer Sheba to leave the Land. God commanded him not to leave Holy Land, but to move to Gerar. After some bad relations between Isaac and the Philistines, Isaac returned to Beer Sheba where God appeared to him at night to bless and reassure him. Then Isaac built an altar and invoked HASHEM.

[In Isaac's time, Beer Sheba, in the Gerar Valley, belonged to Philistia, as pointed out in the footnotes on pp. 736 and 1100 (following Ramban's comm. to 21:32 and the accepted Rabbinic view). When the land was apportioned among the Tribes, it became part of Judah's territory. As Sforno and others write on 26:3, even in Isaac's time Gerar — and certainly Beer Sheba — was considered part of the Land that would be inherited by the children of Israel. The description of Eretz Yisrael's borders as extending "from Dan (in the north) to Beer Sheba (in the south)" is almost proverbial and occurs numerous times in Scripture. Thus, Beer Sheba was both in Eretz Yisrael and in Philistia. Consequently, by living in Beer Sheba (see 26:33), Isaac satisfied both of God's commands that (a) being an *עֹלָה תָּמִיד*, an 'unblemished offering,' he not reside outside of Eretz Yisrael (Rashi 26:2); and (b) that he sojourn in Philistia (*ibid.*, v. 3).

[The site was prominent in Jacob's life as well, for it was from there that he embarked on his journey to Laban in Charan. He had gone to Beer Sheba — to the site of his grandfather's *eshel*, and his father's altar — to ascertain whether it was indeed God's Will that he forsake Eretz Yisrael. On his way to Charan, he slept at Mt. Moriah and had his prophetic dream, which included a ladder upon which angels went up and down. The ladder was standing in Beer Sheba (see comm. to 28:17, p. 128), and it was in that dream that he was promised Divine protection.

[It is to Beer Sheba, also, that Jacob now came again, as he began his journey to Egypt — a journey which would mark the beginning of the foretold Egyptian Exile.]

Although Beer Sheba was on the way to Egypt, the Torah would not have mentioned that Jacob stopped there unless he had some reason for doing so. The commentators give several reasons why Jacob made Beer Sheba his major way station:

a) As noted in the footnote, Jacob stopped there, as he did once before, to seek Divine inspiration and permission to leave the Holy Land — especially since God had forbidden Isaac to leave the Land. R' Munk writes that Jacob's desire to receive the Divine blessing before his descent to Egypt is all the more understandable since he and his sons were still very apprehensive at the prospect of leaving the Promised Land for a country where new hardships might await them. As noted in our commentary to 42:1, this was the reason the brothers hesitated when they were first going down into Egypt to buy provisions.

Furthermore, he was apprehensive since he foresaw the beginning of the presaged Exile (Ramban; see below). At the same time he had the dual fear that his children would intermarry with the Egyptians and that his remains would not be interred in the Cave of Machpelah. It was about these fears that God reassured him in the next verse (Akeidas Yitzchak).

b) According to the Midrash, Jacob's further purpose in going to Beer Sheba was to cut down Abraham's *eshel* [the grove of trees] (21:33). He took the trees to Egypt, knowing prophetically that they would provide the *shittim* (cedar) wood for the Tabernacle that his descendants would be commanded to build in the desert after the Exodus.

[Rashi cites this in Exodus 25:5, and writes that Jacob replanted the trees in Egypt and ordered his children to take

them along when they would leave there, for use in the Tabernacle. According to Yafeh Toar, these trees grew straight up without knots for thirty cubits (45-60 feet).]

The expression בארה שבע is synonymous with לבאר שבע; the suffix ה replaces the prefix ל, to [Cf. לארץ=ארצה] (Rashi).

וַיִּזְכֹּךְ וַיִּזְכֹּךְ לֵאלֹהֵי אָבִיו יִצְחָק — And he slaughtered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

[Several reasons are offered below for Jacob's offer of a sacrifice at this juncture — many of which are connected with the very purpose of his coming to Beer Sheba and which form the basis for the revelation of reassurance God was about to give him. Other comments focus on זָכָה — the unusual term describing the sacrifices — while still others focus on the phrase to the God of his father Isaac instead of the more general God of his forefathers, or God of Abraham. Let us cite each in turn and the syntactical implications of the passage will become clear.]

Rashi comments:

... To the God of his father Isaac: [Isaac is particularly mentioned because] a man owes more honor to his father than to his grandfather. Therefore, Jacob associated [the sacrifice] with Isaac rather than Abraham. [This follows the view of R' Yochanan in the Midrash.]

Ramban counters that Rashi's comment does not suffice. Jacob should have associated the sacrifices with both Abraham and Isaac, as he did in his prayer for help (32:10) and his expression of gratitude (48:15). Or the verse could have said simply He slaughtered sacrifices to God without specifying either Patriarch.

To this objection Mizrahi replies that Rashi is not trying to explain why Jacob preferred Isaac to Abraham: if such were the

case, *Rambam* would be right in arguing that either both or neither should have been associated. Instead, *Rashi* means to explain an entirely different point. Since Abraham was the first mortal to proclaim God's greatness on earth, it stands to reason that God should be described *only* as Abraham's God; if so it would seem to be wrong for Jacob to omit Abraham's name completely. *Rashi* explains, therefore, that a son is justified in ascribing honor to his father, consequently Jacob need not have been required to use the plural, 'my fathers' to associate the sacrifice with both Abraham and Isaac. Nevertheless, the omission did not exclude Abraham, because the honor ascribed to Isaac also reflected upon Abraham, the one who proclaimed God's glory to Isaac as well as to all humanity. And since, as *Rashi* points out, someone owes more honor to his father than to his grandfather, Jacob was justified in mentioning only Isaac.

Ramban continues that the emphasis on *Isaac* is intended to imply a kabbalistic secret alluded to by the Sages: Jacob was fearful of the grave consequences the Egyptian exile might have for his descendants. Such an exile was indicative of the Attribute of Justice, for we find God, in His relationship to Isaac, described as *יָצַק*, the *Dread of Isaac* — this appellation denoting the purest form of Awe, which inspired Isaac to submit himself to the *Akeidah*, [see 31:42]. In directing his prayers to the 'God of Isaac,' Jacob wished to seek a softening of this harsh manifestation of God in order that Divine judgment not be directed at him. [He chose the appellation God of *Isaac* rather than of *Abraham* — since it was Isaac whom God had warned not to go down to Egypt (*Racanati*).] — Jacob accompanied his supplications with peace offerings, because they symbolize harmony between God and Israel. Jacob prayed at the same place

where Isaac had requested Divine permission to leave *Eretz Yisrael*, and where he himself had received such permission [53 years earlier] when he went to Laban's home in Paddan Aram [see footnote].

The Midrash explains the prominence given Isaac here: "When a Rabbi and his disciples are walking on a road, you first greet the disciples and afterward you greet the Rabbi." [That is, since the disciples travel in advance of the Rabbi, a person coming from the opposite direction would first meet the disciples and then the Rabbi. Similarly, Isaac is the 'disciple' and Abraham the 'Rabbi'. Therefore, Jacob offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.]

R' Bachya understands this Midrash in a kabbalistic sense and in a vein similar to that of the Midrash cited by *Rashi*: that the duty of honoring one's father is more imperative than that of honoring one's grandfather. In consonance with *Ramban's* exegesis above, R' Bachya writes that 'his father' alludes to God's title 'the Dread of Isaac,' a description denoting the strictest sense of God's judgment, in contrast to the Godly Attribute of Mercy associated with Abraham. Jacob's personal attribute was a combination of Mercy and Judgment, resulting in *רחמים*, the compassion that comes when judgment is tempered. [This concept is discussed in 'Three Prayers,' an Overview to the ArtScroll *Siddur*.] Since Jacob was closer to Isaac's attribute — because Isaac was the 'discipline' and the father who raised him — Jacob directed his offering toward the attribute he was attempting to soften, that of Isaac.

Kedushas Levi derives from the above that Jacob was reluctant to descend to Egypt, knowing the consequences of his descent. Therefore, he directed his sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac, in the hope that God would deny him permission to leave Canaan just as He had instructed Isaac to remain in the Land.⁽¹⁾

R' Shlomo Ashtruc in *Midrashei Ha-Torah* writes that without doubt Jacob was aware of the vision at the Covenant

1. The commentators note that the sacrifices offered by Noah, Abraham and Isaac were 'burnt offerings' [עֹלֹת], the only type of sacrifices known to the Noachides [Zevachim 116a]. But now, as both thankfulness and apprehension fill Jacob's heart and he prepares to go to his

אֱלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִרְאֵת הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר
ג יַעֲקֹב וַיַּעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַגָּנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי
הָאֵל אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ אֶל-תִּירָא מִרְדֵּה

Between the Parts that Abraham's descendants would be aliens and slaves in a strange land, and he was fearful that the exile and servitude would begin with him. He therefore prayed to the God of his father Isaac, for Isaac was spared the travails of physical exile and servitude even though the four hundred years of alien status commenced with his birth. Jacob prayed for the same dispensation. Accordingly he offered these sacrifices imploring God to spare him these travails just as He spared Isaac. God granted his prayer, as we shall learn below.

2. God appears to Jacob in a nocturnal prophetic revelation and grants him permission to migrate to Egypt.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִרְאֵת הַלַּיְלָה
— And God spoke to Israel in night visions.

Night visions, i.e. the perception of a Divine revelation at night, is one of the levels of prophecy. In *Moreh Nevuchim* 2:41, Rambam holds that while all prophetic reve-

lations (excluding those of Moses) come only in dreams or visions, there is a great distinction between prophetic 'vision' and that which comes in a 'dream' of the night. The latter may come even to impious persons, as in the cases of Abimelech [20:3] and Laban [31:24], but when they awake, they are conscious only of having dreamt. In the case of Jacob, however, it was apparent to him when he arose that God had communicated with him prophetically, and he did not have the misimpression that it was merely a dream. In 2:45 Rambam further analyzes the eleven levels of prophecy and writes that the seventh level of prophecy is a dream in which a prophet perceives that he is being addressed by God.

Ramban writes that God's revelation in a night-vision alludes to nighttime's importance as a period of *רחמים*, clemency in Judgment. It was with the mercy-tempered Divine attribute of Justice that God now appeared to Jacob

long-lost son, he is the first one to offer זבחים — which connote sacrifices in the category of *shelamim* [see further]. (That in 31:54 Jacob also had slaughtered a זבח is no contradiction. There, as *Rashi* notes, the term has a secular sense, and does not denote a sacrifice to God. Our passage is the first time the term appears in a ritualistic sacrificial sense.)

The Sages expound [Toras Kohanim Vayikra 16:1] that the name 'shelamim' sacrifice derives from *shalom*, peace. The sacrifice is so called because it brings peace into the world. Therefore, at this juncture when Jacob feared the consequences his descent into Egypt would have on his descendants, he wanted to pave the way for peace and conciliation. In the kabbalistic sense explained by R' Bachya, he directed the sacrifice to God's Attribute of Power [מַחְהִיכָה] which was nearer to Isaac, because he wanted to soften God's judgment with sacrifices of peace.

[Comp. *Rashi* to Leviticus 3:1 that *shelamim* are so called because "they bring peace to the altar, the priests, and the owners — all who participate."]'

R' Hirsch perceives the connotation of 'completeness' [שְׁלֵמָה] in *shelamim* — the sacrifice that is not burnt completely upon the altar but becomes a meal sanctified by God, a family meal that consecrates all its participants. He suggests that Jacob/Israel brought this sacrifice now because, for the first time, he felt himself happy, joyful, and 'complete' in his family circle.

Another connotation of זבחים is its association with the תודה [thanksgiving] sacrifice. Several commentators [see *Tur*] accordingly suggest that Jacob offered these sacrifices in thanksgiving for a safe journey, or in gratitude that Joseph was still alive (*RI of Vienna*).

² God spoke to Israel in night visions and He said,
 "Jacob, Jacob," and he said, "Here I am."
³ And He said, "I am the God — God of your

and assured him that he should have no fear in Egypt for he would be found righteous in Divine Judgment and be redeemed after the prescribed period of affliction.

God revealed himself to Jacob — whose own painful life corresponded to the period of night — precisely when the 'night of exile' was about to commence. He solemnly announced then that the 'night' would be followed by the dawn of freedom, for if God 'goes down' with him into Egypt [see below], He will also 'go up' with him from Egypt (R' Munk).

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּקֶב — And He said, "Jacob, Jacob." The repetition expresses love (Rashi).

[Rashi makes a similar comment on the repetition "Abraham, Abraham" in 22:11. According to the Zohar cited there, the repetition of his name was intended to animate his spirit and spur him on.]

Radak offers that since Jacob had not received prophetic communication for many years, God now called his name twice so that he should truly understand that it was a Prophetic Spirit that was summoning him [and the sound of his name was not something that he imagined].

God had given Jacob the name *Israel* denoting triumph [see 35:10] and that name is used three times in this section [in verses 1, 2, and 5], but, in addressing him now, God

calls him *Jacob* [the name indicating subservience]. This implies that during his forthcoming stay in Egypt he would not "contend with God and man and triumph", as the name *Israel* intimates, rather he would be in a house of bondage until God will bring him (i.e., his remains or his descendants) back. In verse 8, below, Jacob's family is called the *Children of Israel* although the Patriarch is called "Jacob" in that verse "since the progeny would multiply there and their glory extend." Therefore, the family is given a name alluding to their future growth in Egypt, but the father, who would not live to share that happy fate, is called *Jacob* (Ramban). [See also v. 5 below.]

The Talmud [Berachos 13b] cites our passage as proof that although God changed Jacob's name to *Israel*, one is permitted to refer to him by his old name since the Torah itself calls him *Jacob* in our verse, thus clearly showing that he retained that name. This is unlike the case of Abraham, where one who refers to him as "Abram" transgresses. [See comm. to 17:5 p. 563-4.]

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי — And he said, "Here I am."

Such is the answer of the pious, the expression denoting both humility and readiness (Rashi to 22:1).

3. אֲנִי הָאֵל אֲלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ — I am the God — God of your father.¹¹

[The definite article, 'the' God,

1. Following R' Shlomo Ashtur in *Midrashei HaTorah* cited at the end of last verse: "... I am the God of your father Isaac. — Just as I watched over him, and spared him the travails of servitude during his lifetime, so will I spare you. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt ... for I myself will go down with you to Egypt and protect you."

This is the sense of the Sages' observation [Shabbos 89b; see footnote p. 1699]: "It would have been fitting for our father Jacob to go down to Egypt in iron chains [in the manner of all exiles, since it was by God's decree that he went there (Rashi ad loc.)] but his merit availed him." That is, it would have been fitting for the actual servitude to have begun with Jacob, but his merit availed him, and God delayed, thereby shortening the duration of the period.

מִצְרִימָה כִּי־לִגְוִי גָדוֹל אֲשִׁימָה שָׁם: וְ אֲנֹכִי אֲרָד עִמָּךְ מִצְרִימָה וְאֲנֹכִי אֶעֱלֶה

ויגש
מור

intimates that God introduced Himself to Jacob in the same manifestation as that to which Jacob had just directed his sacrifice. In other words, the perception of God that Jacob held when he offered his sacrifice, is the same one that came to him in this vision. Or, as *Ramban* notes kabbalistically, by calling Himself, "the God," God is designating Himself as the God of Bethel where you anointed a Pillar (31:13) and the God of your father.

— I, the God Who told your father [26:2], 'Do not descend to Egypt,' I am the One Who now tells you not to fear going to Egypt, for I shall make of you a great nation there. For were your children to remain here [in Canaan] they would intermarry with the Canaanites and assimilate, but this will not happen in Egypt 'for the Egyptians could not bear to eat food with the Hebrews' [43:32 (see *comm.* there). Thus, the Hebrews will be a nation set-apart in Egypt], as our Sages stated [*Sifre Devarim*, cited also in the Passover Haggadah (see *ArtScroll-Elias* ed. p. 105f)]: וַיְהִי שָׁם לִגְוִי, and he became there a nation — this teaches you that the Israelites were קְצוּנִים שָׁם, prominent and set apart there [the emphasis being on the word שָׁם, there — in Egypt (*R' David Feinstein*)] (*Sforno*; *Radak*).

Haamek Davar similarly interprets that Jacob was 'apprehensive that his

descendants would be absorbed by the Egyptian nation, but God assured him to the contrary; see below.

— אל תירא מרדה מצרימה Have no fear of descending to Egypt.

[That God was now telling Jacob not to fear going down to Egypt proves, as noted above, that the Patriarch had previously entertained such a fear. Although no previous explicit indication is given in the text that Jacob was afraid of the descent — and to the contrary, as *Abarbanel* observes, Jacob had wanted to see Joseph (45:28) and had begun the journey (v. 1) — nevertheless we are taught that nothing is hidden from God Who penetrates the innermost thoughts of man. The reassurance אל תירא, Fear not! was uttered by God to each of the Patriarchs (15:1 and 26:24), to Moses, and to almost every important personage in Scripture. In each case the commentators seek to uncover the fear which prompted the Divine reassurance. We have recorded some of the fears attributed to Jacob. They range from Jacob's knowledge that this descent would begin the Egyptian bondage, to his fear that the nation might forget its spiritual destiny amid the plenty of Egypt, and that it might choose assimilation with the Egyptians instead of a return to the land of Canaan, which had been promised to his forefathers. To all of these misgivings — and those recorded below — the Divine reassurance alluded.]¹¹

Rashi states simply that God told this to Jacob 'because he [Jacob] was grieved that he was compelled to

1. *R' Hirsch* treats the underlying sequence of events as follows:

As 45:27-28 and 46:1 indicate, Jacob was exultant. What was it that prompted God to tell him 'Fear not ...'? Verse 2 suggests what happened. First, the term *vision of the night* implies that the future held gloom; second, God's use of the name Jacob, instead of Israel, showed that triumph was not to be part of the Jewish future in Egypt. Thus prepared for the worst, Jacob answered הֲנִי, as if to say, 'I am ready for whatever You decide for me.'

To this, God responded, 'Have no fear, Jacob — I am the God to Whom you have dedicated your joyous family offering, and the ultimate purpose of your descent to Egypt, too, is joyous

father. Have no fear of descending to Egypt, for I shall establish you as a great nation there. ⁴ I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely

leave the Land' [i.e. Eretz Yisrael].

[Although *Rashi* is not more explicit, it is clear that he is summing up in this brief comment all of the multiple fears implicit in leaving the Land enumerated by the other commentators.]

Comp. the *Zohar*: When asked why he was afraid to go to Egypt, Jacob replied, "I am afraid that my family will succumb there, that the *Shechinah* will no longer dwell among us, that I will not be buried with my ancestors, and that I will not see the redemption of my children."

God reassured him on each of these accounts: "I will establish you as a great nation there; I will go down with you to Egypt and I will also bring you up from there, and Joseph will place his hand over your eyes."

Furthermore, Jacob feared that if he abandoned Eretz Yisrael, God's promise to give the Land to his descendants might be withdrawn.

God, therefore, assured him to the contrary (*Akeidah*; cf. *Alshich*).

שם — כי לגוי גדול אשימך — For I shall establish you as a great nation there.

There specifically. For your sojourn in Egypt will provide the necessary prerequisite to becoming a great nation. This can happen only there; in Canaan you could not maintain the separateness needed to form you into a unique nation (see *Sforno* above).

As *R' Hirsch* expresses it in his comm. to 45:11: ... In Canaan, where the family of Jacob was accepted as a

neighbor, Israel could hardly have developed into a nation. As it became more populous, its members would have been scattered among the inhabitants. To become a nation without assimilation, they had to live among a nation that was opposed to the very nature of the Jews as a matter of principle. Egypt was that nation.

In this connection *Harav David Feinstein* notes that the word מצרים, Egypt, is spelled with the letters (but not the vowels) of מצרים, straits or confines. This refers to the ghetto existence of Egypt and many other countries where Jews lived. Despite the suffering and oppression endured in such places, the ghettos had the positive result of binding the Jews together.

Have no fear about going to Egypt. Just as I forbade your father to go there, I am assuring you that just as the Exile and servitude foretold to Abraham is imminent, so is the blessing I bestowed upon him when I said (12:2): ואני אגיד לך, I will make of you a great nation. This will be fulfilled there (*Chizkuni*; *Tzeidah laDerech*).

God thus also intimated to Jacob that notwithstanding Jacob's earlier thoughts, he would not return to Canaan after seeing Joseph, but would remain in Egypt until his descendants became a great nation (*Abarbanel*).

4. — אנכי ארד עמך מצרים — I [the Hebrew אנכי has an emphatic connotation: I personally] shall descend with you to Egypt.

In the figurative sense: My protection will extend to you even

greatness, for in Egypt your family will become a great nation, as I promised you and your ancestors. I will accompany your family there and, at the proper time, when they have become a nation, I will lead them back to Eretz Yisrael. As for you personally — you will not be separated from Joseph again.

there. In the *Kabbalistic* sense this passage forms the basis of the Rabbinic concept of *שכינתא כְּלוּתָא*, 'The Shechinah [Divine Presence] in Exile,' for as the *Mechilta* notes: This passage teaches us that when the Israelites descended to Egypt the Divine Presence descended along with them. This concept occurs often in the Talmud. See specifically *Megillah* 29a: 'Wherever Israel was exiled, the Divine Presence was exiled with them ...' This concept is also discussed in the *Overview*. [See footnote].¹¹

The commentators maintain that the *Shechinah* associated Itself with the Israelites descending to Egypt and even joined their number. For according to v. 27 below, the total number of Jacob's descendants was seventy, yet a count of the individual names yields only sixty-nine. According to one view in *Daas Zekeinim* the *Shechinah* is to be counted among the descendants, bringing the total to seventy.

According to *Michtav MeEliyahu*, these words contained the assurance that God would protect Jacob's family from any permanent spiritually harmful effects, and prevent their total assimilation. In accordance with His promise, God redeemed the Israelites before they became altogether submerged in Egyptian idolatry and lost forever.

וְאָנֹכִי אֶעֱלֶה גַּם-עִלָּה – And I shall also surely bring you up [lit. And I shall bring you up, also bring up].

Directed as it is in the singular to Jacob individually who, as we know, died in Exile, this Divine promise refers to the fact that Jacob's body would be buried in his ancestors' sepulchre in the Cave of Machpelah (*Rashi*; *Rashbam*; *Ibn Ezra*).

The expression וְאָנֹכִי אֶעֱלֶה גַּם-עִלָּה is in-

1. Onkelos' principles of translating terms that might imply corporeality.

Rambam [*Moreh*, 1:27] comments on this verse as follows: "Onkelos the proselyte, who knew the Hebrew and Syriac languages perfectly, made every effort to avoid anthropomorphisms (attributions of human form to God). Whenever the Torah (speaking of God) employs a term that might impute corporeality, Onkelos paraphrases it according to its contextual non-anthropomorphic sense. Whenever he finds such a term implying one of the various forms of movement, he interprets the movement in the sense of manifestation or 'appearance.' ... However, to the words *I shall go down with you to Egypt*, he gives a literal translation: וַיָּקָם אֶחָד עֶקֶר לְעָרִים [instead of rendering 'I shall appear ...']".

"That is very noteworthy and it demonstrates the unusual talent of this master and the superlative nature of his interpretation, since, by means of this translation, he lets us perceive one principle of prophecy. The beginning of this narrative says that God spoke to Israel in night visions, etc. Since it is clear from the beginning of the episode that this occurred in night visions, Onkelos does not object to a literal rendering of what had been said in these night visions. And he is right to do so, for he is relating something which had been said, rather than an actual happening, as for example when God came down upon Sinai (*Exodus* 19:20)."

After quoting these views of *Rambam*, *Ramban* gives his own analysis of Onkelos' principles of translation and he reaches a somewhat different conclusion. He holds that Onkelos' reason for not translating literally is not to avoid anthropomorphism, but is rather based on Kabbalistic grounds. Thus, when Onkelos translated the phrase *I shall go down with you to Egypt* in a literal sense, he alluded to the Talmudic statement that the *Shechinah* accompanies Jewry in its wanderings among the nations (*Shabbos* 89b and *Megillah* 29a). Onkelos regards this Divine solicitude for exiled Israel so supremely important that he refuses to paraphrase the verse.

A similar opinion is expressed by such commentators as *Akeidas Yitzchak*, *R' Bachya* and *Or HaChaim*. (See *R' Munk*.)

46 bring you up; and Joseph shall place his hand on your eyes."

terpreted as if it read *וְאֶנִּי אֶעֱלֶה אִתְּךָ*, *I will also surely bring you up* (*Karnei Or*; cf. *Rashbam*).

The particle *גַּם*, *also*, usually indicates a. *particle*, *extension*, beyond the simple meaning of the phrase. In this case, it is interpreted to include also the *bones of Joseph*, which, God promised, would also be brought back to *Eretz Yisrael* for burial (*Akeidah*); also to the bones of all the Tribal Ancestors, for there is a tradition that each tribe brought up the remains of its ancestor (see *Yerushalmi Sotah* 1:10). According to the *Midrash* it signifies: I will bring up not only you, but all those who are righteous like you.

Radak and *Ralbag* maintain that the reference is not to Jacob as an *individual*, but to his descendants: And I will lead your descendants out of Egypt to take possession of the Promised Land. The great nation being formed in Egypt will also be brought home by Me.⁽¹⁾

— And when they come up from Exile, My *Shechinah* which accompanied them will come up along with them (*Pesikta*).

— I will bring you [i.e. your descendants] out of this Exile and I will also bring your children out of future Exiles (*Yafeh Toar*).

According to *Tur*, this is a subtle allusion to the Rabbinic dictum: "Jacob our father did not die" [*Taanis* 5b; see on 49:33].

Sforno explains the phraseology: After I bring you up from Egypt, *אֶעֱלֶה*, *I will raise you* [i.e. your progeny], *גַּם*, *עֲלֶה*, *even higher*, than you were before you went there.

— The double phraseology *Kabbilistically* alludes to the ultimate ascendancy they will achieve: The spiritual rise to the heights of the World to Come (*R' Bachya*).

וְיֹסֵף יָשִׁית יָדוֹ עַל-עֵינֶיךָ — *And Joseph shall place his hand on your eyes*.

The expression *place his hand on your eyes* is idiomatic; literally it refers to closing the eyes of the deceased, but in practice it denotes taking care of burial arrangements, a duty and privilege devolving primarily on the firstborn. For reasons which will be discussed in the *comm.* to 49:3-4, certain rights of the firstborn passed from Reuben to Joseph. Jacob was now informed that Joseph will retain his exalted position and the privilege of "closing his father's eyes" would be

1. *Oznaim l'Torah* synthesizes the expositions:

אֶנִּי אֶעֱלֶה, *And I will bring you up*, that is, God assured Jacob that he would be buried in *Eretz Yisrael*, *גַּם אֶעֱלֶה*, *also bring up* — that He would bring up out of Egypt the 'great nation' which Jacob's descendants will become in Egypt. Without such an assurance that Israel would not assimilate among the Egyptians, there would be no value to the promise of establishing of his great nation!

In fulfillment of the promise *I shall go down with you to Egypt and I will also surely bring you up*, God Himself would later descend to Egypt to redeem the children of Israel.

As the author of the *Passover Haggadah* records the exegesis: '*HASHEM brought us out of Egypt* — not through an angel ... but the Holy One Blessed is He alone in His Glory' [see *ArtScroll Haggadah* p. 120ff]. This appears difficult, however, — why indeed He did not do it through the agency of an angel? ... It was because in this passage God 'obligated Himself' to take them out personally [this being the connotation of the more emphatic *אֶנִּי* denoting exclusiveness, instead of *אֲנִי*].

Similarly we recite in *Hallel* [*Psalms* 114:5]: *מֶה לָּךְ הָיָה בַּיָּם בַּיָּם ... מִלִּפְנֵי אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב*, *What ails you, O sea, that you flee? ... Before the God of Jacob*. The Sea fled before the God of Jacob; in describing the Exodus, the Psalmist relates God to Jacob, because He came Himself, as it were, to liberate the Israelites as He had promised Jacob.

יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שֶׁבַע וַיֵּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶת־יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם וְאֶת־טַפָּם וְאֶת־
נְשֵׁיהֶם בְּעֶגְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח פָּרְעֹה

ויגש
מוה

given him (Zohar). [See *Me'am Loez*].

The blessing implicit in this promise was that Jacob's children would not die before him, but that his son — and not strangers — would personally attend to his burial (see *Rashbam*, bottom of *Bava Basra* 108a).

God specifically assured Jacob that Joseph would survive him since on many occasions Jacob had expressed apprehension that Joseph would die before him and he would descend to the grave as a mourner. Furthermore, God intimated that Jacob would not leave Egypt alive, but would die there (*Or HaChaim*).

Rashbam [in *Chumash*], *Radak* and others render the passage figuratively: Joseph, who will survive you, will look after your affairs [ענין=ענין] and provide for your family when you are gone.

5. Jacob and his family set out for Egypt.

וַיָּקָם יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שֶׁבַע — *So Jacob arose from Beer Sheba.*

The term 'arose' implies in the literal sense that Jacob had been kneeling, thankful for the past and praying for the future. Now he 'arose' and set out on the journey. Furthermore, it was truly a 'rising' for he had been informed that the *Shechinah* would accompany him and redeem his descendants (*Tz'ror HaMor*).

The expression וַיָּקָם, *he arose* [in the sense of *prevailed upon him-*

self], is significant. It implies that the matter was difficult for Jacob because he knew he was going into bondage. With great effort he had to muster up all his energy to continue. Compare a similar meaning of this verb in 19:34: *And the younger got up* [וַתָּקָם, *arose*], where the connotation is also that the matter was difficult for her (*Haamek Davar*; *R' Hirsch*).^[1]

Abarbanel maintains that this is what the *Passover Haggadah* means when it describes Jacob as going down to Egypt *אָנוּס עַל פִּי ה'רַבּוּר*, 'compelled' by the Divine decree [*ArtScroll Haggadah* p. 103], while the surface narrative would imply to the contrary: rather than being coerced, Jacob was merely being reassured by God not to fear going down to Egypt. However, as we have noted, God was responding to Jacob's deep-seated fear against going to Egypt, and as this 'informal reassurance' came from God, Jacob went as if he were "compelled" by direct command. [See *Overview*.]

וַיֵּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם וְאֶת־טַפָּם וְאֶת־נְשֵׁיהֶם — [And] the sons of Israel transported [lit. carried] Jacob their father as well as their small children and [their] wives.

The change of names in this clause between *Israel* and *Jacob* is instructive. Jacob's sons did not

1. On the verse *And Jacob lifted his feet* [29:1] *Rashi* comments that, 'At the good tidings which Jacob had received assuring him of God's protection, his heart "lifted his feet" and he felt very light as he continued his journey.'

But here, too, Jacob had heard good tidings that Joseph was still alive, and he was on his way to see him. Why is there no allusion here of his heart 'lifting his feet' and feeling very 'light'?

The answer is that now Jacob was going down to Egypt, to a long Exile. The verse therefore

⁵ So Jacob arose from Beer Sheba. The sons of Israel transported Jacob their father, as well as their small children and wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to transport him. ⁶ They took their

realize what a sad future lay ahead in Egypt; they thought they were on a triumphant journey [as the name *Israel* implies (see Ramban above v. 2, s.v., יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל).] Their brother was viceroy in Egypt, and they proudly considered themselves children of *Israel*. Jacob, however, knew that they were beginning a new era of 'Galus' during which he would have to assume the subervient role represented by his name *Jacob*. The Torah alludes to this by calling him Jacob. Therefore it says: The sons of 'Israel' led their father 'Jacob' (R' Hirsch; Yalkut Yehoshua).

See also Sforino who maintains that as they set out on their journey to Exile they are referred to as children of *Israel*, since henceforth they would have to be a people who will 'strive with God and man' [see 32:29]. The name *Jacob* is also mentioned as an allusion to the 'destiny' [connected with עֶקֶב, *heel*, from which the name Jacob is derived] that awaited him. The Patriarch was now going to his ultimate joy, which would not be followed for him by any sorrow, his troubles over at last. This presaged the destiny of his progeny who, after all their troubles, will experience joy. Thus, it is written [Jeremiah 31:7]: *Sing with gladness for Jacob*.

Sechel Tov notes the order of priority as reflective of their levels of love: *their father, children, and*

wives. See comm. to 31:17 where Jacob gave priority to his children, whereas the lecherous Esau gave priority [in 36:6] to the women.

According to *Midrash HaGadol*, the meaning of the passage is that the brothers literally carried their father in their arms, and transported their children and wives in the wagons. [The verse would accordingly be translated: *And the children of Israel carried Jacob their father; and their small children and their wives (they transported) in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to transport him.*]

Tur interprets similarly, and, noting how no act goes unrewarded, suggests that now they were repaying Jacob for his earlier kindness when they were young children and he carried them across the stream [32:24].

The *Midrash* notes the irony in Jacob's now being carried, and applies to him the verse in *Ecclesiastes* 9:11: *The race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong ...* "It was [figuratively] only 'yesterday' that Jacob was so mighty that he singlehandedly rolled off the boulder from the well's mouth [see 29:8-10], yet when his own time came he was so frail that he had to be carried bodily."

בְּעֶגְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר-שָׁלַח פַּרְעֹה לִשְׂאֵת אוֹתוֹ –
In the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to transport [lit. to carry] him.

Pharaoh, not Joseph, is mentioned as the sender, because it was by his royal authority that the wagons were permitted to be exported from Egypt. Furthermore, this is repeated with a view of

intimates that it was against his will, and not joyously. He had to muster up all his strength to raise himself up from that spot. Therefore, we see later that his sons had to transport him in the wagons: Even his legs became enfeebled and reluctant to trudge into exile. He therefore had to be transported (*Itturei Torah*).

ויגש מוריו וישא אתו: ויקחו את־מקניהם ואת־רכושם אשר רכשו בארץ כנען ויבאו מצרימה יעקב וכל־זרעו אתו: בניו ובני־בניו אתו ובנותיו ובנות בניו וכל־זרעו

showing how Pharaoh had invited the family of Jacob to come to Egypt (*Akeidah*).

To transport him, i.e. Jacob, primarily. The others were secondary (*Lekach Tov*).

ויקחו את־מקניהם ואת־רכושם אשר רכשו בארץ כנען ויבאו מצרימה — *They took their livestock and their wealth which they had amassed in the land of Canaan and they came to Egypt.*

Now that Jacob resolved to settle in Egypt for as long as God willed him to remain, he took all his wealth and cattle with him. The Torah does not mention this when telling that he set out for Beer Sheba. Perhaps Jacob's family had intended merely to accompany him and see Joseph, but when God's approval for their descent and sojourn in Egypt was revealed to them, they consented to bring all their wealth and cattle. Alternately, the Torah also informs us to their credit that even though Jacob's family knew about the impending Exile, not one of them hesitated to fulfill the debt of the foretold Exile, but they took their small children, etc., and went to Egypt (*Or HaChaim; Alshich*). [This differs from some of the views mentioned above that the brothers were then unaware of the long stay that awaited them in Egypt.]

[That the Torah specifically mentions *the wealth he amassed in the land of Canaan* intimates that the immense wealth he amassed while working for Laban in *Paddan Aram* (31:18) is excluded]:

The fortune Jacob acquired in Paddan Aram he gave to Esau in payment for a burial place in the Cave of Machpelah. He said, 'The possessions of countries [outside of Eretz Yisrael] are worthless

to me.' [See below, 50:5] (*Rashi; Tanchuma*).

[On the translation of מקנה, lit. *possessions*, as *livestock*, see *comm.* to 31:18.]

יעקב וכל זרעו אתו — *Jacob and all his offspring with him.*

Not one of his descendants stayed behind (*Abarbanel*).

7. [The Torah characteristically proceeds to specify who are included in the general designation זרעו, *his offspring*]:

His sons and grandsons with him.

I.e., these went freely and eagerly with him. As the verse proceeds to imply, however, he had to *force his daughters and grand-daughters* as well as the rest of *his offspring* — meaning his great grandchildren — to come with him; these *הביא אתו*, *he brought* [i.e. forcibly] *with him to Egypt*. Support for this interpretation may be derived from the Rabbinic dictum that the actual *bondage* did not begin while any of those who originally descended was still alive, as it says [*Exodus* 1:6] *And Joseph died ... and all that generation* [i.e. who descended to Egypt; cf. *comm.* there]; only then did the bondage begin. Perhaps, being spared bondage was their reward for willingly submitting to the Divine Decree of descending to Egypt. ... The proof of this is that Yocheved and Serach were among these that originally went down to Egypt, yet the bondage began during their lifetimes. We must accordingly maintain that they did not

livestock and their wealth which they had amassed in the land of Canaan and they came to Egypt — Jacob and all his offspring with him. 7 His sons and grandsons with him, his daughters and grand-

earn a reward because Jacob brought them, and it was not of their own will that they came (*Or HaChaim*).

On the other hand, R' Hirsch perceives it greatly significant and a tribute to the Patriarchal family that every member of the family went with Jacob: "They were all with him, and united with him. Jacob did not share his fathers' grief, of seeing estrangement among his children; and although they had already formed many families, they all grouped themselves in unity about their Father Jacob. They trusted him, and everyone went along to Egypt."

בָּנָיו וּבָנוֹתָיו — *His daughters and granddaughters* [lit. and the daughters of his sons.]

Exactly who is referred to by the plural *daughters* is unclear inasmuch as Scripture mentions only Dinah as a daughter of Jacob. The Midrashic controversy in this matter has been treated in the *comm.* to 37:35 where the plural *daughters* also occurs. Briefly, as noted there, R' Yehudah maintains that a twin sister was born with each of Jacob's sons, thus Jacob had many daughters; while R' Nechemiah maintains that the term *daughters* refers to Jacob's daughters-in-law since 'it is quite common for one to refer to his daughter-in-law as his "daughter".'

Rashi does not comment on the word *daughters* in our verse but focuses instead on the phrase *daughters of his sons*, which he in-

terprets as referring to 'Serach daughter of Asher and Yocheved the daughter of Levi.'

Ramban cites this interpretation and observes that Rashi leaves the plural of *his daughters* unexplained. [It is certain that Rashi could not be suggesting that it refers to twin sisters as he does in 37:35 since, in v. 26 below, he specifically writes that according to R' Yehudah's view that twin sisters were born with Jacob's sons, they must have died before Jacob and his family went down to Egypt since they are not enumerated. Nor can our verse refer to Canaanite daughters-in-law, as R' Nechemiah interprets 37:35, since our verse explicitly mentions Jacob's זָרַע, *offspring* (*Nimukei Shmuel*; cf. *Mizrachi*; *Maharsha* to *Bava Basra* 123b).]

Ramban accordingly suggests that in genealogical lists it is common for Scripture to use the plural form for an individual. For example in v. 23 below: *And the sons of Dan: Chushim* [see *comm.* there]; and *Numbers* 26:8: *And the sons of Pallu: Eliab*. Therefore, in our verse too, though *daughters* is in plural it refers to only Dinah. Moreover, only Serach who was already born is meant by *daughters of his sons*, but Yocheved whose name is not mentioned was not [since according to tradition she was not born until they actually entered the walls of Egypt] although in the opinion of the Sages [*Bava Basra* 123a] she is alluded to [see *comm.* to v. 15].

Daas Zekeinim maintains that by the plural *daughters*, Jacob's grand-

ויגש מוח-י ה הביא אתו מצרימה: ואלה שמות בני-ישראל הבאים מצרימה ט יעקב ובניו בכר יעקב ראובן: ובני י ראובן חנוך ופלוא וחצרן וברמי: ובני שמעון ימואל וימין ואהר ויכין וצחר

daughter, Jochebed, is included, as 'grandchildren are like children.' [The difficulty with this, as later commentators note, is that Jochebed is already included in the designation *daughters of his son*.]

According to *Ibn Ezra*, perhaps Dinah and Serach had young personal attendants who grew up with them and who were regarded as his daughters. [Hence the allusion in the plural term. However, they are not reckoned among the seventy souls since they were not Jacob's biological offspring.]

The *Midrash* observes that *daughters of his sons* are mentioned but not *sons of his daughters*. R' Yehudah bar Ilai said, *Sons' daughters rank as sons while daughters' sons do not rank as sons*. [Halachically, however, this does not apply in matters of inheritance, where daughters' sons share in the inheritance. See *Yafeh Toar*; *Radal to Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 36; Cf. *Bava Basra* 143b.]

ורעו – And all his offspring.

Including his great grandchildren, for example: Chetzron and Chamul the sons of Judah's son Peretz [enumerated below] (*Sechel Tov*; Or *HaChaim*).

הביא אתו מצרימה – He brought with him to Egypt.

He made certain that none stayed behind (*Akeidah*).

The last-mentioned group had to be forced to accompany him (see Or *HaChaim* cited in the beginning of this verse).

☞ List of the Descendants:

8.~14. Descendants through Leah

ואלה שמות בני-ישראל הבאים מצרימה יעקב ובניו – Now these are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming [lit. the comers] to Egypt – Jacob and his children.

The Torah speaks of them – in the context of the time-frame of the narrative – as באים, coming, in the present tense. "Therefore, one need not be surprised that it does not state אשר באו, who came" [in past tense] (*Rashi*).

The intent of *Rashi's* comment is to explain why, though the Torah was committed to writing about two and a half centuries later, the present rather than the past tense was used. He answers that in correct literary style the narrative was placed in the perspective of the time in which the event actually occurred, not when it was reported, and therefore the present tense was used (*Mizrachi*; *Be'er Yitzchak*).

The Jewish nation is based on chaste, pure family life, just as its census counts in the Wilderness were always reckoned according to its families. In the same way, at the moment of their entry into Egypt they are all enumerated according to their genealogy – יעקב ובניו, Jacob and his children. They were so united that Jacob himself is counted as one of them [see *Rashbam* below] (*R' Hirsch*).

[On their being referred to here as 'children of Israel' while the Patriarch himself is referred to as Jacob, see *Ramban* above v. 2 s.v. Jacob, Jacob.]

R' Bachya makes the observation "all of the Patriarchs were called 'Israel' [in the sense that 'Israel' alludes to triumph over all opposing forces]. Here Isaac is called Israel, since Jacob and his sons are called children of Israel. Abraham is also referred to as Israel inasmuch as it is written (*Exodus* 12:40): Now the sojourning of the children of 'Israel' who dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and

46 daughters and all his offspring he brought with him
8-10 to Egypt.

⁸ Now these are the names of the children of Israel who were coming to Egypt — Jacob and his children: Jacob's first-born, Reuben.

⁹ Reuben's sons: Chanoch, Pallu, Chetzron and Carmi.

¹⁰ Simeon's Sons: Yemuel, Yamin, Ohad, Yachin,

thirty years, whereas it is known that the computation of the sojourning began from Isaac; accordingly children of Israel in that verse refers to the children of Abraham." [See comm. 15:14.]

The phrase *Jacob and his sons* implies that Jacob is included in the count of seventy [verses 26-27 below] (*Rashbam*). [This is not the universal opinion, however; see comm. to v. 15 below.]

בְּרֵאשִׁית רַעֲבֵן — Jacob's firstborn Reuben.

Since his infraction with Bilhah, the birthright was taken from Reuben and given to Joseph [see 35:22]. Nevertheless, he was called 'firstborn' here only with regard to the division of the territory in *Eretz Yisrael*. The reason the Torah specifically designated him here as 'firstborn,' when the title could have been avoided entirely, is because Reuben acted like a first-born when he attempted to save Joseph [37:21] (*Zohar; Lekach Tov*).

9. בְּנֵי רַעֲבֵן — Reuben's sons:

חֲנוֹךְ וּפְלֹא וְחֶצְרֹן וְכַרְמִי — Chanoch, [and] Pallu [and] Chetzron, and Carmi.

The Sages derive exegetical significance in Scriptural names, and explain that these names were Divinely inspired to allude to the destinies of the respective people. We shall cite a representative

sampling of such interpretations. Most are taken from *Midrash Sechel Tov*, whose author, according to *Torah Sheleimah*, apparently had before him a no-longer-extant Midrash on the subject of Biblical names and their meanings.

Chanoch: He was so called because he was involved in the *chinuch* [education] of his sons; and he was named after the righteous Chanoch [5:21-24].

Pallu: Signifies destruction [see *Onkelos to Deut.* 13:6 who renders *destroy* as וְהַפְּלִי] inasmuch as his descendants were removed from the world. He had only one son, Eliab, who in turn begot Nemuel, Dathan and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram later perished in punishment for participating in the revolt of Korach, and only Nemuel survived.

Chetzron and *Carmi* were both born after the incident with Bilhah, when aspects of Reuben's birthright were taken from him. Thus *Chetzron* [deprivation], alludes to the forfeiture of these rights. Similarly *Carmi*, from the word כָּרַם meaning shame, intimates how Reuben's face paled with shame at that incident (*Sechel Tov*).

10. וּבְנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן — Simeon's sons:

יֵמֻאֵל וְיָמִין וְאֹהַד וְיָחִין וְצֹחָר — Yemuel, [and] Yamin, [and] Ohad, [and] Yachin, [and] Tzochar.

[The reader interested in the Midrashic allusions of these names

ויגש מוֹיָאֵיִב יב וְשָׁאוֹל בֶּן־הַכְּנַעֲנִית: וּבְנֵי לֵוִי גִרְשׁוֹן
 יב קָהָת וּמֶרָרִי: וּבְנֵי יְהוּדָה עֶר וְאוֹנָן וְשִׁלָּה
 וְפֶרֶץ וְזָרַח וְיִמָּת עֶר וְאוֹנָן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן

is directed to *Torah Sheleimah* 46:8 55-58 and notes thereon.]

[In the parallel lists in *Exodus* 6:15 ff, *Numbers* 26, and *I Chronicles* 2-8 several of the names listed here occur with slightly different spellings. We will indicate them as they are encountered. Some of the nuances of these differences are treated by the commentators in *Numbers*, and especially in *I Chronicles*, and will א"י be cited there. *Radak* in *Chronicles* 4:24 comments, 'You will see that regarding most Hebrew names of people or cities there is no concern over the substitution of a letter or two. Just as in the case of nations who are referred to by two names which bear no resemblance to one another, and one calls them in one place by one name and in another by another name.']

Yemuel is identical with the Yemuel listed in *Exodus* 6:15, and with Nemuel in *Numbers* 26:12. (See *R' Shmuel b. Chofni*).

Tzochar is identical with Zerach in *Numbers* 26:13, both names meaning 'light.' (*Rashi* to *Numbers* 26:13).

Both Ohad and Yachin are mentioned in *Exodus*, but not in *Numbers*. *Rashi* in *Numbers* 26:13 mentions that certain Simeonite tribes became extinct either after the death of Aaron or after the sin at Baal Peor. In *Chronicles* Yairiv is substituted for Ohad and Yachin. There is an opinion that the remnants of these two sub-tribes united to form a new group.

1. According to the Talmud [*Sanhedrin* 82b; see also *Targum Yonasan*] 'son' of a Canaanite means: "one who acted like a Canaanite." This 'son' is identified with Zimri who later com-

— *And Saul son of the Canaanite woman* [or: *Canaanite*].

In the most literal sense, this verse is tacit proof that only Simeon, of all the brothers, married a woman of Canaanite descent, and the Torah therefore singles him out for it as he did wrong in taking a Canaanite wife. [The Canaanites were an accursed race, and one must recall Abraham's intense efforts to assure that Isaac would not marry a Canaanite woman (see 24:3), and Isaac's similar charge to Jacob (28:1)] (*Ibn Ezra*).

Ramban interprets similarly in 38:2. See also *Rashi* to 50:13 and *comm.* there.

According to the predominant Rabbinic view advanced by *Rashi*, 'Canaanite' refers to Dinah. He explains that Saul was actually the son of Dinah who is here called a Canaanite because she had been ravished by the Canaanite Shechem. When her brothers killed Shechem, Dinah refused to accompany them until Simeon agreed to marry her, which he did (*Rashi*; *Midrash*).^[1]

[See *comm.* to 34:26; 37:35; *Ramban* to 38:2; *Mizrachi* and *Gur Aryeh* who discuss the identification with Dinah and the halachic aspects of this marriage; *Tiferes Zion* to the *Midrash*; *Maskil l'David* and *Divrei David*. [See also *Rashi* to 50:13.]

According to one view in the *Midrash* [*Bereishis Rabbah* 80:10] Dinah is here called a Canaanite [not to evoke her shame, as the Torah is careful about the honor of every creature (*Tiferes Zion*)] but because Simeon brought her [re-

46 Tzochar, and Saul, son of the Canaanite woman.

11-12 ¹¹ Levi's sons: Gershon, Kehas, and Merari.

¹² Judah's sons: Er, Onan, Shelah, Peretz and Zerach; but Er and Onan had died in the land of Ca-

mains from Egypt] and buried her in Canaan.

11. **ובני לוי** — Levi's sons:

גֶרְשׁוֹן וְקֵהָס וּמֵרָרִי — *Gershon, Kehas, and Merari.*

Kehas [or Kehath] was the grandfather of Moses.

Midrash HaGadol notes that the mention of Kehas as one of the emigres to Egypt corroborates the promise made to Abraham in 15:16 that the fourth generation shall return here. For according to one computation, the four generations were: Kehas, who entered Egypt, Amram, Moses, and Moses' sons, the latter who entered the Land. [See *Ramban* cited in 15:16.]

12. **ובני יהודה** — Judah's sons:

עֵר וֹנָן וְשִׁלָּה וּפֶרֶץ וְזָרַח — *Er, [and] Onan, [and] Shelah, [and] Peretz, and Zerach.*

[The first three were born to Judah's first wife, the daughter of Shua, while the last two were born to Tamar.]

וַיָּמָת עֵר וֹנָן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — *But [lit. and] Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan.*

Since it is known that Er and Onan had died and are not included in the number of those who descended, why did the Torah deem it important to enumerate them at all in this verse among Judah's children?

— *Ramban* in v. 2 poses the question and answers it mystically by noting that " ... it is due to a secret

which can be known from the words we have already written. The learned student [of Kabbalah] will understand this as well as the meaning of the entire verse."

The commentators explain that *Ramban* is alluding to the mystical doctrine of transmigration of souls to which he refers in 38:8 [see footnote 2 on p. 1675]. In a mystical sense, according to *Alshich* (38:27), the souls of Er and Onan were reincarnated in the bodies of Peretz and Zerach after Judah performed the levirate union with Tamar. Thus, Er and Onan were still to be listed among Judah's children though they had died.

In a similar manner, *Or HaChaim* maintains that the souls of Er and Onan transmigrated into the bodies of Peretz's sons, Chetzron and Chamul. This accounts for the unusual phraseology **וַיְהִי כִּי-פָרַץ חֶצְרוֹן וְחָמוּל** — *and they — i.e., Er and Onan, who had died — became the sons of Peretz Chetzron and Chamul*, rather than simply **פָּרַץ חֶצְרוֹן וְחָמוּל**, *and the sons of Peretz: Chetzron and Chamul* [without the word *וַיְהִי*]. Apparently *Sechel Tov* interprets similarly; see below.]

According to *Ibn Ezra* in v. 10 who interprets that both Simeon and Judah married Canaanite wives in the literal sense, the Torah mentioned the names of Er and Onan to draw attention to the fact that these children begotten from a Canaanite wife were evil and subsequently died. [See *Yohel Or*.]

R' Hirsch emphasizes that whenever the Torah mentions Er and Onan, it always stresses that they had died.

mitted the heinous act of brazen immorality in Shittim [see *Numbers*:25]. Indeed, the Talmud records that, "he had five names: 1. Zimri; 2. ben Salu [ibid 25:14]; 3. Saul; 4. *ben Canaanis*; 5. Shelumiel son of Tzurishaddai" [see *Maharsha*].

ויגש מו/יג-טו יג ויהיו בני-פרץ חצרון וחמול: ובני
 יד יששכר תולע ופנה ויוב ושמרון: ובני
 טו זבלון סרר ואלון ויחלאל: אלהובני לאה
 אשר ילדה לעקב בפרן ארם ואת דינה
 בתו כל-נפש בניו ובנותיו שלשים

Belonging to the Godly family is not simply a matter of Jewish parentage. It carries the responsibility to live a pure and moral life, and failure to do so is not without consequence. The fate of Er and Onan recalls this lesson.

And — ויהיו בני-פרץ חצרון וחמול
Peretz's sons were Chetzron and Chamul.

Their grandfather Judah named the elder, declaring: 'May Chetzron be named in memory of the loss [Chesron] of my sons Er and Onan.' When the second was born he declared, 'Now God has had compassion [Chamal] on me and recompensed me with these, for my sons Er and Onan' (*Sechel Tov*).

[See *Or HaChaim* above.]

According to the traditional Rabbinic chronology presented on p. 1667, a total of twenty-two years elapsed between the sale of Joseph and Jacob's descent to Egypt. During this relatively short period the following transpired: Judah married the daughter of Shua [ch. 38]; Er, Onan and Shelah were born; he gave Er in marriage to Tamar, and Er died; Onan was then given to Tamar, and Onan also died. Tamar remained a widow for one year, after which Judah consorted with her and she gave birth to Peretz and Zerach. Peretz grew up, married, and had Chetzron and Chamul — Judah's grandchildren — who were among those who entered Egypt.

Thus, three generations spanned this twenty-two year period, and

careful analysis will yield that Er, Onan, and Peretz could not have been older than 8 years when each of them married, a fact most noteworthy, but not unusual in Biblical times. See *Seder Olam* ch. 2, and cf. *Ibn Ezra* to 38:1.

13. ובני יששכר—Issachar's sons:

Tola [and] Puvah, [and] Yov and Shimron.

Yov is identified with Yashuv in *Numbers* 26:24 and *I Chronicles* 7:1. [See *comm.* there.] As an illustrious member of the Tribe known for its spiritual pursuits [see *comm.* to 49:14-15] the name Yashuv signifies that הושיב, he brought Israel back to their Father in Heaven since he devoted his life to Torah study, while Yov signifies how, when he studied Torah, his voice quavered [יבוב] with trepidation (*Sechel Tov*).

According to one view, Issachar later realized that his son's name Yov was disgraceful inasmuch as it was the name of a heathen god. Issachar gave a letter (ש) of his own name to Yov and renamed him Yashuv. [This accounts for the silent 'shin' in יששכר which is pronounced Yissachar rather than Yissas'char; see *Daas Zekeinim* to 30:18, p. 1308.]

14. ובני זבלון—Zebulun's sons:

Sered [and] Elon and Yachleel.

"They were merchants, masters

46 naan — and Peretz's sons were Chetzron and
13-15 Chamul.

¹³ Issachar's sons: Tola, Puvah, Yov and Shimron.

¹⁴ Zebulun's sons: Sered, Elon and Yachleel.

¹⁵ These are the sons of Leah whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan Aram, in addition to Dinah his daughter. All the persons — his sons and daughters — numbered thirty-three.

of commerce, nourishing their brothers ... " [see 49:14] (Targum Yonasan).

15. אלה בני לאה אשר ילדה ליעקב. אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי לֵאָה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב. — These [i.e., the aforementioned] were the sons of Leah whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan Aram.

The sons were born in Paddan Aram; the grandchildren were born in Canaan (Sechel Tov).

וְאֵת דִּינָה בָתּוּר — In addition to Dinah his daughter.

The males are associated with Leah [these are the sons of Leah] and the female with Jacob [his daughter], to teach you that when the woman emits seed first she bears a male, but when the male is the first to emit seed she bears a female (Rashi from Niddah 31a).

[The exact connotation of this dictum in contemporary medical terms is unclear. The inference is either that the time relationship of ovulation to conception affects the sex of the fetus, or that female glandular secretions affect in some way the sex determining chromosomes of the male seed.]

Possibly the Torah emphasizes that Dinah was his daughter to stress that though she was defiled by Shechem, Jacob did not alienate her but still considered her his daughter in every respect (R' Sheah Brander).

¶ The birth of Yocheved; the unnamed descendant.

— בְּלִיגֶפֶשׁ כָּנִי וּבְנֹתָיו שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשָׁלֹשׁ — All the persons—his sons and daughters, numbered [lit. were] thirty-three.

— A detailed count, however, yields only thirty-two! The thirty-third one is Yocheved who was born [as they entered the gateway] between the walls [or according to the reading in the Midrash: at the gates of Egypt] on the way into the city, as it is written [Numbers 26:59]: [Yocheved ...] who was born to Levi in Egypt. — [This is interpreted to imply:] she was born in Egypt, but she had not been conceived in Egypt (Rashi).

[Therefore, since she was still unborn when they set out, the Torah did not name her; but because she would be born by the time they reached the inner walls of Egypt, the Torah included her in the total count.]

[This is based on Bava Basra 123a and the Midrash. However, in both of these sources the interpretation is inspired by the fact that the aggregate total is given in v. 26 below as seventy whereas only sixty-nine names are enumerated. In providing a running commentary to Scripture, however, Rashi attaches his comment here, instead of v. 26, since it is in our verse that the discrepancy is first encountered.

[Yocheved's birth at this time — when the famine still raged — raises the question of how Levi indulged in procreation in violation

of the rule that one must abstain from conjugal relations in time of famine. This has been discussed at length in the *comm.* to 41:50.]

Ibn Ezra's approach.

Characteristic of his literal approach to Scriptural interpretation, *Ibn Ezra* (v. 23) finds great difficulty in the Midrashic interpretation that Yocheved was born as they entered Egypt. [To preserve the flavor, there follows an almost literal translation:]

"... It is surprising why Scripture did not mention the miracle wrought for her, for [if she was born as they entered Egypt, it follows that] she gave birth to Moses when she was 130 years old! [The duration of the Israelite stay in Egypt was 210 years. Moses was 80 years old when he stood before Pharaoh shortly before the Exodus; accordingly he was born 130 years after the Israelites arrived in Egypt. If his mother Yocheved was indeed born as Jacob's family entered the gates, she would have been 130 years old when Moses was born. According to Rabbinic tradition cited by *Rashi* in *Exodus* 2:1, Yocheved was truly 130 years old when Moses was born.]

"And why did the Torah publicize the case of Sarah, who gave birth when she was ninety years old [i.e., if the miracle of Yocheved's giving birth at a much older age was even greater]? And as if this 'distress' was not enough, the liturgical poets (*payyatanim*) composed a *piyut* for Simchas Torah wherein Moses is poetically quoted as saying, *יוכבד אמי אחרי התהימ*, *Yocheved my mother, be comforted after my death* [implying that Yocheved outlived Moses]. Accordingly, Yocheved would have been 250 years old [when Moses died, adding 130 to Moses' lifespan of 120]. Now, that Ahijah the Shilonite [*I Kings* 11:29] lived a life of long duration is an Aggadic exposition or the opinion of an individual." [According to *Seder Olam* and *Bava Basra* 121b, Ahijah the Shilonite was one of those who enjoyed exceptional longevity. He was among those who left Egypt and was still alive in the days of Jeroboam I, king

of Israel — a period of about 550 years. *Ibn Ezra* maintains that if this Aggadic tradition of Ahijah's exceptional longevity of close to 550 years was the basis for the *payyatan's* assertion that Yocheved could have been alive when Moses died, this conclusion has no bearing on the exposition of Scripture in its literal sense, inasmuch as the *Seder Olam* exegesis is the opinion of an individual (see *Ibn Ezra's* comment to *Exodus* 19:17; however cf. *Rambam*, intro. to *Yad*; *Ra'avad* there; and intro. of *Kesef Mishnah*).

Instead, *Ibn Ezra* [as does *Rashbam*, *Lekach Tov*, *Roibag*, *Abarbanel*, and *Radal* to *Pirkei d' Rabbi Eliezer* 839] goes on to maintain that in the *p'shat* — simple sense of Scripture — Jacob himself is included in the count. He explains that, "the verse should be interpreted as if it read, *All the persons — his sons and daughters* [including himself] — *were thirty-three*. Proof of this is that it said above [v. 8]: *These are the names of the children of Israel coming to Egypt, Jacob and his sons* ... Jacob thus being included in the count. The fact that several verses seem to imply that only Jacob's descendants are included in the count [see v. 26; *Exodus* 1:5] is no contradiction inasmuch as the Torah often includes an individual in a general context. An example of this occurs in 35:26, which lists Jacob's sons *who were born to him in Paddan Aram*. Benjamin is included although he was born in Canaan, since the Torah generalizes ... And this is the primary interpretation." [This opinion, that Jacob was included in the count also follows one view in the *Midrash*. *R' David Feinstein* queries, however, why if Jacob is included in the total count, he is enumerated specifically here among Leah's children, rather than with the total in verses 26-27 below. וי"ע.]

[Nevertheless, *Ibn Ezra's* opinion that Jacob is to be included in the total count of descendants, a view shared by many commentators — and even by one Sage in the *Midrash* — does not necessarily conflict with the Rabbinic tradition that Yocheved was born at the precise moment they entered Egypt. The difference lies only in whether

she is to be included in the count of thirty-three, and later in the total count of the seventy souls who descended to Egypt. Those who expound the literal sense of the passage suggest that the number includes Jacob, while others — citing the tradition that Yocheved was born as they entered Egypt — include her in the account. There is even the view, advanced by *Daas Zekeinim* above that it is the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence), that promised to 'descend' with them, that is included in the count.

[It is because *Ibn Ezra* attempts to rationally disprove the notion of Yocheved's exceptional longevity, however, that *Ramban* enunciates his lengthy refutation which follows.]

Ramban's defense of the Rabbinic tradition.

Ramban cites *Ibn Ezra's* disagreement with the tradition of Yocheved's longevity and his question of why, if she actually lived so long, the Torah does not mention the miracle of her giving birth to Moses at such an advanced age. In an expression of 'open rebuke and hidden love' (as *Ramban*, in his introduction to *Bereishis* describes the mixture of criticism and admiration with which he reacted to *Ibn Ezra's* sometimes controversial comments), *Ramban* takes exception to *Ibn Ezra's* stance.

In a discourse fundamental to the correct understanding of Biblical narratives, *Ramban* maintains that Yocheved's advanced age at the time of Moses' birth is indeed a miracle, but of the category of 'hidden' miracles, which constitute the foundation of the Torah. [See *Ramban* to 27:1 where he explains

that 'hidden' miracles are occurrences that do not clearly show Divine intervention, but appear to be merely part of the 'natural' order, while 'obvious' miracles are those which incontrovertibly defy the 'laws of nature', and clearly and undeniably are recognized as direct Divine intervention. See also *Exodus* 6:2; *Levit.* 26:11.] Even according to *Ibn Ezra's* thesis that Yocheved could not have been born at the gateway to Egypt, we cannot escape the fact that unusual longevity existed in Moses' family. For Yocheved was clearly Levi's daughter, and Levi was 43 years old when the family went down to Egypt. [Jacob was 87 years old when Levi was born; since Jacob describes himself as 130 when he stood before Pharaoh (further 47:9) it follows that Levi was 43 at the time.]

Now, there is no doubt that Moses was born 130 years after the descent into Egypt, since he was 80 at the time of the Exodus. Therefore, if we were to presume that Levi did not beget Yocheved for many years after they arrived in Egypt — say, for example, 57 years — then [following *Ibn Ezra's* rationale] there would be *two* miracles here: a) that Levi begot a child at the age of 100 [the age at which Abraham had Isaac], and b) Yocheved would still have been an elderly woman of 73 when Moses was born! And should we postpone Yocheved's birth to an even later time [as *Ibn Ezra* would have it] then the wonder of Levi's begetting her at such an advanced age increases dramatically!¹¹¹

1. *Ramban* proceeds to enunciate the principle that 'The Torah mentions [only] miracles performed through a prophet and which he previously prophesied, or performed by an angel who is revealed in the course of a Divine mission. However, those "hidden" miracles effected "naturally" in order to help the righteous or destroy the wicked are not mentioned in the Torah or in the books of the Prophets ...

'For why should Scripture mention "hidden" miracles when all the foundations of the Torah are hidden miracles! Every assurance in the Torah is truly a sign and wonder, since the concept of heavenly death for one who has transgressed the prohibition of forbidden unions is not natural, nor is it "natural" that the "heavens should become like iron" [*Levit.* 26:19] because we sowed our fields in a Sabbatical [שמיטה] year.

'Similarly, all of the Torah's assurances of blessings that will result from observance of the *mitzvos* and all the good fortune enjoyed by the righteous ... as well as all our prayers, are predicated on miracles and wonders, except that there is no heralded change in the nature of the world, as I have already explained [see above 17:1] and I will yet explain further [*Lev.* 26:11] with the help of God.'

ויגש מו/טזיט טו וְשֵׁלֶשׁ: וּבְנֵי גֹד צִפְיוֹן וְחָגִי שׁוּנִי וְאַצְבֵּן
 יז עֲרֵי וְאַרְדּוֹי וְאַרְאֵלִי: וּבְנֵי אֲשֵׁר יִמְנָה
 יח וְיִשׁוּנָה וְיִשׁוּנִי וּבְרִיעָה וְשֶׁרַח אֲחֻתָּם וּבְנֵי
 יח בְּרִיעָה חֶבֶר וּמִלְכִּיאֵל: אֵלֶּה בְנֵי זִלְפָּה
 אֲשֶׁר-נָתַן לָכֵן לְלֵאָה בְּתוֹ וַתֵּלֶד אֶת-
 יט אֵלֶּה לְיַעֲקֹב שֵׁשׁ עָשָׂרָה נָפֶשׁ: בְּנֵי רַחֵל

Ramban proceeds to draw support from the case of Obed [Boaz's son, and grandfather of King David] who, according to the Sages, lived more than 400 years, and Ruth who, according to tradition, was still alive in the days of King Solomon.

He maintains that it was not Abraham's age alone at the birth of Isaac that was miraculous, for old age does not affect someone until three-quarters of his life has passed, and Abraham, who lived to be 175, begot Isaac twenty-five years prior to the completion of two-thirds of his lifespan. Moreover, Abraham had children forty years after the birth of Isaac [see 25:1ff] — something far more noteworthy.

Rather, the real miracle in the case of Abraham and Sarah [which puts it into the category of an 'open' miracle that is worthy of mention in the Torah] was that they could not have children together in their younger years, and now, at relatively advanced ages, they begot a child. Moreover, in Sarah's case the additional wonder was that she no longer menstruated [see 18:11] and so was incapable of giving birth.

Accordingly, Ramban concludes, "if Yocheved's lifespan reached her father's age [of 137 years (Exodus 6:16)] and her vitality remained with her near her old age, as is the case, it is not an obvious miracle that she gave birth at the age recorded by the Sages [i.e. 130 years]. It is because God wanted to redeem Israel through the brothers [Moses and Aaron], and since the time of the redemption had not yet come, He delayed their births many years until

their mother was old. Nothing is too difficult for HASHEM!"

16-17 Descendants through Zilpah.

[See Ramban v. 18].

16. וּבְנֵי גֹד — Gad's sons:

צִפְיוֹן וְחָגִי שׁוּנִי וְאַצְבֵּן עֲרֵי וְאַרְאֵלִי — Tziphion, [and] Chaggi, [and] Shuni, [and] Etzbon, Eri, [and] Arodi and Areli.

[In Numbers 26:15-16, Tziphion occurs as Tzephon, and Etzbon occurs as Ozni. The Midrash derives exegetical significance in these changes.]

17. וּבְנֵי אֲשֵׁר — Asher's sons:

וְשֶׁרַח אֲחֻתָּם — And their sister Serach.

Tur writes: "Some interpret [see Ramban to Numb. 26:46] that inasmuch as it does not say *Serach* his daughter, the implication is that she was not Asher's daughter but was the daughter of his wife [i.e. from a previous marriage]. And so does Onkelos translate Numbers 26:46, *Serach the daughter of Asher* as: "Serach the daughter of Asher's wife" [our versions of Onkelos do not read this way; but see *Sefer HaYashar* where this tradition is recorded]. However, I do not understand this," Tur continues, "because our Scriptural narrative is enumerating only those who were Jacob's biological descendants 'that

¹⁷ Asher's sons: Yimnah, Yishvah, Yishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serach; Beriah's sons, Cheber and Malkiel ¹⁸ These were the descendants of Zilpah whom Laban had given to Leah his daughter. These she bore to Jacob: sixteen persons.

¹⁹ The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife: Joseph and Benjamin.

came out of his loins' [v. 26; accordingly, that she was Asher's daughter is immaterial to the listing of Jacob's descendants]. Rather, that she is identified in keeping with the Scriptural style to identify women through their brothers. For example [36:22]: *Lotan's sister was Timna*" [also 4:22; 25:20; 28:29; Exod. 6:23; 15:20].

[Serach had played a special role in gently informing Jacob that Joseph was still alive. For her comforting mannerism, Jacob blessed her with exceptional longevity and following the tradition cited in the *comm.* to 45:26, she was one of the righteous people who never experienced death and entered live into the Garden of Eden.]

Comp. Targum Yonasan: "And Serach their sister — who was carried away while yet alive into the Garden of Eden because she had announced to Jacob that Joseph was still alive. It was she who saved the inhabitants of the city of Abel from death in the days of Joab."¹¹

18. אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָכֵן לְלֵאָה. בְּתוּרָה — These [enumerated above]

were the descendants of Zilpah, whom Laban had given to Leah his daughter.

As a servant, and Rachel freed her (*Sechel Tov*).

The Torah generally lists Leah's children first, then Rachel's, and then the servants. In this case, however, the four mothers are enumerated in descending order according to the number of their children, because the purpose is to show how the total of seventy was composed. Therefore Zilpah's more numerous descendants are listed before Rachel's (*Ramban*).

וַתֵּלֶךְ אִתָּהּ לְיִצְחָק שֵׁשׁ עָשָׂר נַפְשִׁים — These she bore to Jacob: sixteen persons [lit. soul(s)].

The *Vilna Gaon* observes that in this genealogy the descendants of the matriarchs [Rachel and Leah] were double those of their respective servants [Bilhah and Zilpah]. Leah's descendants totaled 32 [the number 33, as noted, includes Yocheved or Jacob], while those of Zilpah, her servant, numbered 16;

1. The incident of Joab, King David's commanding general and the city of Abel is formed in *II Samuel* 20:14-22 and expanded upon in *Bereishit Rabbah* 94:9. Sheva ben Bichri was a traitor who followed Absalom's rebellion against David. As a rebel, Sheva was liable to the death penalty and Joab was dispatched with a troop of soldiers to carry it out. Sheva took refuge in Abel whereupon Joab laid siege to the city. Since the townspeople refused to surrender Sheva, Joab was prepared to fight them to the last man. Scripture relates that אִשָּׁה חֲכָמָה מִן הָעִיר, a wise woman of the city, spoke to Joab and convinced him to leave the city alone if they would give up Sheva. Then, as explained by the Midrash, she shrewdly convinced the townspeople to execute Sheva, whereupon Joab lifted the siege.

ויגש
מו/כא-כג
כ אֶשֶׁת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף וּבְנֵימָן: וַיּוֹלֵד לְיוֹסֵף
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָהּ-לוֹ אֶסְנַת בַּת
פּוֹטִי פַרְעֹ כֹהֵן אֵן אֶת-מְנוּשָׁה וְאֶת-
כא אֶפְרַיִם: וּבְנֵי בְנִימֵן בְּלַע וְגִבְרָ וְאֶשְׁבֵּל
גְּרָא וְנַעֲמָן אַחֵי וְרֹאשׁ מַמִּים וְחָפִים
כב וְאֶרְדִּי: אֵלֶּה בְנֵי רָחֵל אֲשֶׁר יָלַד לְיַעֲקֹב
כג כָּל-נַפֶּשׁ אֲרֻבָּעָה עָשָׂר: וּבְנֵי-דָן חָשִׁים:

Rachel's descendants numbered 14, while those of Bilhah, her servant, numbered 7 (*HaKsav V'Hakabbalah*).

19.-20. Descendants through Rachel.

19. בְּנֵי רָחֵל אֶשֶׁת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף וּבְנֵימָן —
The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife: Joseph and Benjamin.

Since for the reason mentioned above [v. 18], Rachel was preceded in this chapter by Zilpah, special honor is now paid to her by designating her as Jacob's wife (*Ramban*).

None of the other wives are described as *Jacob's wife*; Rachel however, was the *עֲקֵרַת הַבֵּית*, *mainstay of the household* [i.e. his principal wife, since it was for her that he initially had agreed to work for Laban] (*Rashi*; see *Rashi* to 31:4;31:33, and *Midrash* to 29:31 s.v. *רחל עֲקֵרָה*).

[See also 44:27 where even Judah quotes his father as referring to Rachel by the designation *אִשְׁתִּי*, *my wife* (*par excellence*).

Though Rachel was the primary wife she was not blessed with abundant progeny as was Leah. But she surpassed Leah in the quality of her children. This is why, as *Sforno* notes, the Torah assigns a special honor to her: In the case of the

other three wives, we are not told that, for example, the children of Leah were Reuben, Simeon, etc. Only in Rachel's case does the Torah say *The sons of Rachel* ... However, she earned special mention because her sons were the most outstanding, as the Talmud (*Sotah* 36b) teaches, Joseph was worthy to be the father of twelve tribes, and (*Shabbos* 55b) Benjamin never sinned.

20. אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָהּ-לוֹ אֶסְנַת בַּת-פּוֹטִי פַרְעֹ — כֹהֵן אֵן
Whom Asenath daughter of Poti Phera chief of On bore to him.

She bore them to him in the sense that she converted to Joseph's faith and raised the children in a manner dedicated to his ideals (*Midrash Tadshe* cited in *Torah Sheleimah* §105; comp. *comm.* 41:50).

It says, *These are the generations of Jacob — Joseph* [37:2] because Joseph was like Jacob in every way [see commentary there]. For this reason the Torah mentions the name of Joseph's wife and her father [which it does not do in the case of the other sons], just as the names of Jacob's wives and their father Laban are mentioned when Jacob's genealogies are listed (*Tz'ror HaMor*).

[The translation of *בִּהֶן* as *chief* follows *Rashi* to 47:22. *Ramban* to 41:46 interprets

²⁰ To Joseph were born in the land of Egypt — whom Asenath daughter of Poti Phera Chief of On bore to him — Manasseh and Ephraim.

²¹ Benjamin's sons: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Echi, Rosh, Mupim, Chupim, and Ard.

²² These were the descendants of Rachel who were born to Jacob, fourteen persons in all.

²³ Dan's sons: Chushim.

the word in its usual sense of priest.

[On the identity of Poti Phera with Potiphar see *comm.* to 41:46. On Asenath, see footnote there (p. 1800).]

אֶת מְנַשֶּׁה וְאֶת אֶפְרַיִם — Manasseh and Ephraim.

The particle *אֶת* is often exegetically interpreted as connoting a רבוי, extension, beyond the literal scope of the noun it precedes, as if it implied 'along with ...'. In this case, the *אֶת* preceding the names of Manasseh and Ephraim implies: *and all who were descended from them*. For just as Jacob's own children were to develop into subdivisions and families, so were the families of Manasseh and Ephraim [who themselves were the heads of tribes] destined to develop into subdivisions (Tz'ror HaMor).

21. וּבְנֵי בְנִימִן — Benjamin's sons:

בֵּלַע וְבֶכֶר וְאַשְׁבֵּל גֶּרָא וְנַעֲמָן וְאָרִד — Bela, [and] Becher, [and] Ashbel, Gera, [and] Naaman, Echi, [and] Rosh, Mupim, [and] Chupim, and Ard.

[The names appear differently in Numbers 26:38 and in I Chronicles 7:6, 8:1. See Rashi and *comm.* to Numbers 26:24 and Malbim to I Chron. 7:6.]

[Benjamin had his 'lost' brother, Joseph, in mind when he named his children. For as Rashi notes in 43:34 each one of these names referred to Joseph and signified in some way the troubles that had befallen him. See footnote p. 1883.]

22. אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי רַחֵל אֲשֶׁר יָלַד לְיַעֲקֹב — These were the descendants of Rachel who were born to Jacob.

[The Hebrew verb *יָלַד*, *was born*, is in singular. In Scriptural style the singular is often to be construed collectively. Comp. 41:50 וְלִיוֹסֵף יָלַד שְׁנֵי בָנִים.]

אֶרְבָּעָה אָרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר — Fourteen persons in all [lit. all soul(s): fourteen].

Counting children and grandchildren (Tz'ror HaMor).

23-24. Descendants through Bilhah.

23. וּבְנֵי דָן — Dan's sons:

חֻשִׁים — Chushim.

The plural *sons* is used even though only the name of one son is given.

Ibn Ezra conjectures that the phraseology implies that Dan might have originally had two sons, one of whom died and is therefore not named.

Radak, R' Shmuel b. Hofni, and most other commentators, however, maintain that Dan's only son was Chushim. The plural *sons* is used with the following meaning: *All of Dan's sons were only Chushim*. Similarly do we find in Numbers 26:8: *And the sons of Pallu: Eliab*. The form occurs frequently in

ויגש כד ובני נפתלי יחצאל וגוני ויצר ושלם:
 מו/כד-כח כה אלה בני בלהה אשר-נתן לכן לרחל
 בתו ותלד את-אלה ליעקב כל-נפש
 כו שבעה: כל-הנפש הבאה ליעקב
 מזרימה יצאי ירכו מלבד נשי בני-
 כז יעקב כל-נפש ששים ושש: ובני יוסף
 אשר-ילד-לו במצרים נפש שנים כל-
 הנפש לבית-יעקב הבאה מצרימה
 ונאת-יהודה שלח ששי כח שבעים:

Scripture. [See also *1 Chron.* 2:8. *R' Shmuel b. Chofni* lists eleven instances where the plural *sons* is used and only one son is listed].

In v. 7 above, too, as *Ramban* there notes, the plural *daughters* is used although only *Dinah* is meant. He cites our verse and explains that in genealogical lists it is common for Scripture to use the plural form for an individual.

From our passage the Talmud [*Bava Basra* 143b] derives a law of inheritance. If a dying man, with a son and a daughter, said לבני, *my property should go to my sons* (in the plural), do we say that the plural form was intended to include his daughter [in which case, the word לבני would be understood to mean *my children*], or do we say that he meant only his son, but people sometimes refer to a single son in the plural? Our verse is cited as proof, since Dan's only son is described as ובני דן, the sons of Dan.

Although this is the settled law, as proven from other verses, the Talmud cites a different interpretation of our verse, as taught by the Academy of Chizkiah. The name *Chushim* may not have been his proper name. Instead, *Chushim* may mean fast-growing leaves of a reed and denotes how [in later generations (*Tosafos* s.v. שְׁהוּי)] Dan's offspring — though descending from an

only son — would become השים, as numerous as the leaves of a reed just as undergrowth develops from only a single root.

The implication, as *Tosafos* writes, is that at this point Dan had only one son who was named *Chushim* in anticipation of Dan's future progeny (*Meam Loez*). [In Numbers 26:42 he is called *Shucham*.]

Comp. *Targum Yonasan*: "The sons of Dan — prolific men and merchants of whose numbers there is no end."

According to the tradition cited in *Sotah* 13a *Chushim* was deaf and very powerful. It was he who killed *Esau* [see *Commentary* to 49:21 and 50:13].

24. —Naftali's sons: ובני נפתלי

Jahzeel, — יחצאל וגוני ויצר ושלם, [and] Guni, [and] Jezer and Shilem.

25. אלה בני בלהה אשר נתן לכן לרחל בתו — These were the descendants of Bilhah, whom Laban had given to Rachel his daughter.

— As a servant, and Rachel freed her (*Sechel Tov*).

— ותלד את-אלה ליעקב כל נפש שבעה — [And] she bore these to Jacob — seven persons in all [lit. all soul(s): seven].

She bore in the sense that those mentioned descended from her, and

46 ²⁴ Naftali's sons: Yahzeel, Guni, Yezer and Shilem.
24-27 ²⁵ These were the descendants of Bilhah whom Laban had given to Rachel his daughter. She bore these to Jacob: seven persons in all.

²⁶ All the persons coming with Jacob to Egypt — his own descendants aside from the wives of Jacob's sons — sixty-six persons in all.

²⁷ And Joseph's sons who were born to him in Egypt numbered two persons. All the persons of Jacob's household who came to Egypt [totaled] seventy.

'grandchildren are like children' (R' Shmuel b. Chofni).

26. The totals:

כל הנפש הבאה ליצקב מצרימה — כל נפש וששים נפש — All the persons [lit. soul] coming with [lit. to] Jacob to Egypt ... sixty-six persons in all [lit. all the soul: sixty-six].

That is, all the persons who set out on the journey from Canaan to Egypt numbered 66, thus excluding Joseph and his sons, who were awaiting them in Egypt. [Leah's listed descendants: 32; Zilpah's: 16; Rachel's: 11; Bilhah's: 7=66.] The word *בָּאָה*, accented as it is on the second syllable, *בָּאָה*, is in the present (imperfect) tense *were coming*, as in 29:6: *בָּאָה עִם הַצֹּאן*, *Rachel ... was coming with the sheep*, meaning that those who were accompanying Jacob to Egypt numbered sixty-six. [See next verse] (Rashi).

וְיָצְאֵי ירכו מלכד נשי בני-יצקב — His own descendants [lit. who emanated from his loins], aside from the wives of Jacob's sons.

I.e., the total included only blood descendants of Jacob, exclusive of his daughters-in-law.

[The Midrashic controversy

regarding the identity of Jacob's daughters-in-law is given in 37:35 and 38:2. Briefly, R' Yehudah maintains that twin sisters were born together with each of Jacob's sons, and the siblings married one another (see *comm.* there and to v. 10 above). R' Nechemiah maintains that the brothers married Canaanite women. Following R' Nechemiah, Canaanite daughters-in-law are not mentioned, because, as the verse tells us, they were not Jacob's biological descendants.]

Following R' Yehudah's view that twin sisters were born with each of Jacob's sons [and accordingly, as Jacob's biological descendants, they should have been enumerated as was Serach], Rashi maintains that it must be assumed that they died before this. [And the fact that it says *aside from the wives of Jacob's sons* implies that the sons remarried, and these wives, not being Jacob's biological descendants, are not numbered among the seventy (Divrei David; see Gur Aryeh).]

Ramban cites Rashi and disagrees with his conclusion that the twin sisters died. Since they were married to the brothers, the Torah alludes to them in the phrase: *aside from the wives of*

Jacob's sons. They need not be counted separately since a man and his wife are one with regard to raising a family.

[Ramban in 37:10 derives from the absence of any mention of Jacob's wives in this genealogy that they had all died by this time. It is unclear how this reconciles with the view advanced here that wives are not counted separately since husband and wife are one.]

27. ובני יוסף – Joseph's sons:

אשר ילד-לו מצרים נפש שנים – *Who were [lit. was] born to him in Egypt were two persons [lit., two soul(s)].*

The singular ילד, *was born*, possibly indicates that Manasseh and Ephraim were twins and born in one childbirth (Radak to 41:50).

☞ The 70 Descendants

כל הנפש לבית-יַעֲקֹב הָבָא מִצִּיפְטָה שְׁבַעִים – *All the persons [lit. soul] of Jacob's household who had come to Egypt [totaled] seventy.*^[1]

Unlike v. 26 above, here the accent on the word בָּאָה is on the first syllable, בָּ, to indicate the past tense: The number of people who had actually *come* to Egypt was 70. The 66 immigrants found Joseph and his two sons there [so they are also included in the number who arrived there], and Yocheved was ad-

ded to their number at that point because, as noted, she was born 'between the walls' (Rashi).

As discussed at length in the *comm.* to v. 15, if one were to count the individual names enumerated in this chapter, one would find a total of only 69, not 70, names. Rashi thus follows the traditional Rabbinic tradition that the unnamed seventieth person is Yocheved.

☞ Other views of who completed the total number of 70:

- The Patriarch Jacob himself is to be counted among the group as the expression *Jacob and his children* in v. 8 might imply [see *Ibn Ezra* v. 15].
- The Divine Presence was the seventieth, for He joined their group, as it were, in fulfillment of His promise to Jacob [in v. 4]: *I will go down with you.*^[2]
- Furthermore, *Rosh* at the end of *Pesachim* advances the view that in the simple sense, no one is 'missing', since it is reflective of Biblical usage for the Torah to round off a number when just one unit is missing (e.g. 69 to 70).^[3]

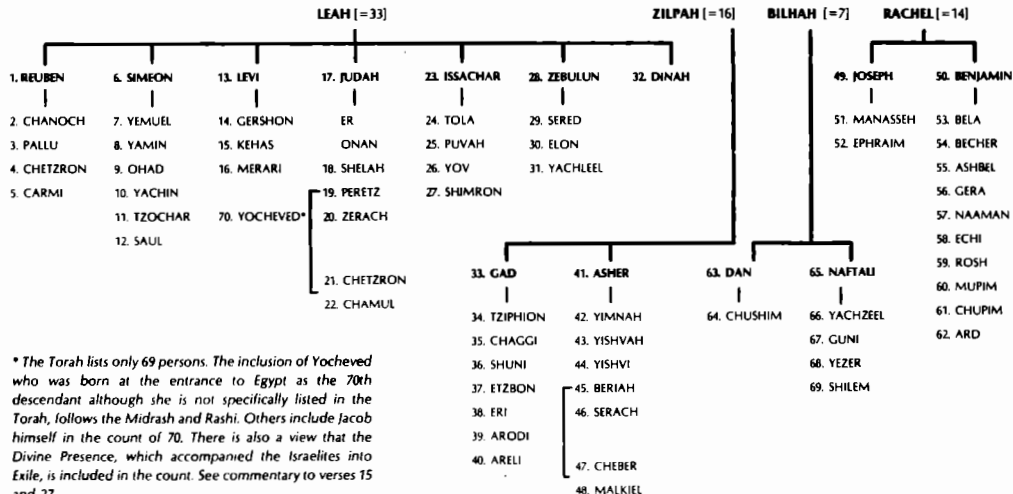
1. Although when he left Canaan, Esau's family consisted only of six members [himself and his five sons], the Torah, in 36:6, uses the plural term נַפְשֹׁת, 'souls of his house,' since they each worshipped different gods [and were not unified, each of them being, different personalities, and each displaying, as it were, different 'souls']. In the case of Jacob's family, however, although it consisted of seventy members, the Torah uses the singular term נֶפֶשׁ, *soul*, since they all served one God [and displayed a single 'soul']. Thus, the souls the Jewish people are joined in their collective closeness to God, for as they affirm their bond with God, they form one organism.] (Rashi citing *Vayikra Rabbah*).

2. The tradition of the Divine Presence 'associating' Itself, as it were, with the righteous, has precedent. Abraham had asked God to include His Majesty with the righteous of Sodom in order to make up the necessary quorum of ten to save the inhabitants [see on 18:28, s.v. (הַתְּשׁוּחִית). Joseph's brothers, too, when selling Joseph, associated the Divine Majesty in order to complete a quorum to effectuate their solemn ban against divulging what they had done [see footnote p. 1653]. Similarly, according to *Midrash HaGadol*, when the Israelites left Egypt they numbered 599,999 and the Divine Presence associated with them to bring the total up to the sacred mystical number 600,000.

3. [*Torah Temimah* questions the latter interpretation inasmuch as the discrepancy leading to the need to identify a 'missing' person does not originate with this verse where the number 69 might merely have been rounded off to 70, but originates in v. 15 where the number of Leah's descendants is given as 33 although a name-by-name count yields only 32.]

☛ The 70 who descended to Egypt

JACOB



* The Torah lists only 69 persons. The inclusion of Yocheved who was born at the entrance to Egypt as the 70th descendant although she is not specifically listed in the Torah, follows the Midrash and Rashi. Others include Jacob himself in the count of 70. There is also a view that the Divine Presence, which accompanied the Israelites into Exile, is included in the count. See commentary to verses 15 and 27.

The Torah's purpose in stating their number was to accentuate the miraculous increase they enjoyed in Egypt. For at this juncture they numbered but 70 persons, and at the Exodus they numbered 600,000 males of fighting age! (Ramban).

Thus, in the Passover Haggadah we repeat the verse [Deut. 10:22]: *With seventy souls your fathers went down to Egypt, but now God has made you as numerous as the stars of the heavens.*

Sfas Emes and others elaborate on the connection between Jacob's seventy descendants and the seventy primary nations of whom the Sages frequently speak. *Deuteronomy* 32:8 teaches *יָצַב גְּבוּלוֹת עַמִּים לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*, [God] set the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the Children of Israel. Just as each nation has its own unique role to play on the stage of history, so each member of Jacob's family made his own special contribution to the development of the national destiny. The seventy souls also correspond to the 'seventy aspects of the Torah,' because each Jew has his own share in understanding and embodying the Torah's teachings. [See R' David Feinstein's explanation of the significance of the many parallels to the seventy nations in the footnote on p. 309.]

28. Jacob dispatches Judah

Joseph had informed Jacob that he would be dwelling in Goshen [45:10]. Now that Jacob neared the Egyptian border, he sent Judah ahead [Rashi explains לִפְנֵי as:

before his arrival] to Joseph to alert him of their arrival so that the necessary preparations could be authorized and carried out.

— וְאֵת-יְהוֹנָדָה שָׁלַח לִפְנֵי אֶל יוֹסֵף
[And] he [Jacob] sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph.

The subject is Jacob. The Torah often omits the subject when it is evident from the context (Radak).

[The Torah emphasizes that he sent him to Joseph. All necessary preparations had to be authorized by Joseph.]

Jacob chose Judah for this since he was the sovereign over his brothers, as will become clear when Jacob blesses his sons on his deathbed [see 49:5ff]. Reuben forfeited his primary position following the incident with Bilhah; Simeon and Levi were likewise passed over because of their impetuosity in the matter of Shechem.

By his many deeds, Judah had consistently demonstrated himself to be the most accomplished and competent of Jacob's older sons. It was only Judah to whom Jacob entrusted Benjamin, and he had proven to be reliable. Jacob therefore chose him for this mission as they drew near the Egyptian border (Akeidah; R' Bachya).

During the years that Joseph was missing, Jacob had suspected Judah of foul play in that deed [see Rashi to 49:9 s.v. מִסְתָּרָף]. But when it became known how loyally Judah had offered himself to the viceroy of Egypt in Benjamin's place [see 44:33], Judah was cleared of all further suspicion. Therefore, Jacob now sent Judah (Tanchuma).

Moreover, Jacob had been informed how greatly Joseph was impressed with Judah for risking his life to secure Benjamin's freedom and how this self-sacrifice caused Joseph to become very fond of Judah. Jacob therefore chose Judah (*Yafeh Toar*).

Furthermore, since it was Judah who started this good deed by initially approaching Jacob [44:18], Jacob now gave him the opportunity of completing it. Indeed we learn that whoever starts a good deed should complete it [see *comm.* to *Exod.* 40:33] (*Midrash HaGadol*).

According to *Kohes Rabbah* 9:15, God rewarded Judah by inspiring Jacob to choose him since he was so instrumental in protecting Benjamin. [According to this exposition, the implied subject of this passage is God Who — by so inspiring Jacob — in effect sent Judah.]

להורות לפניו — To prepare ahead of him [lit. before him] i.e., in advance of his arrival (*Rashi*) in -- [lit. to] Goshen.

The commentators differ regarding Judah's exact mission.

Rashi following *Onkelos*, interprets: 'To prepare a place for him [Jacob] and show him [להורות = להראות] how to settle there.'

There is an opinion [see *R' Munk*] that the subject of this clause is Joseph. That is, Jacob sent Judah ahead to Joseph so that Joseph could make the still necessary preparations for the family in Goshen.

According to *Radak*, *Chizkuni*

and *Akeidah*: To ask Joseph to provide them with a guide to take them directly to Goshen so that they could avoid the metropolis of Egypt entirely.

Jacob did not want to give the impression that he unilaterally moved into Goshen with all his family. He realized that the Egyptians would judge him by their own petty standards. For this reason, he wanted Joseph to appoint a guide to lead them to Goshen (*R' Hirsch*).

Rashi cites an alternate interpretation from the *Midrash* [which understands להורות in its other sense of to teach (from the root ירה, the same word from which *Torah* derives)]: 'To establish for him a House of Study [בית תלמוד] from which teaching [הוראה] could go forth.'

That is, 'To prepare a study house from which Jacob would teach Torah, and where the Tribal Ancestors would read the Torah, ... for it is known that the Patriarchs studied the Torah before it was given' (*Midrash; Tanchuma*).¹¹

There is an opinion (see *Midrash* cited by *Radak* on *Joshua* 11:16) that Goshen was originally a region in Egypt, but it became part of *Eretz Yisrael* when Canaan was distributed among the tribes (see 45:10). In reward for undertaking this mission on his father's behalf, Judah earned the privilege that this very fertile region fall in his territory. That the following verse describes Joseph as going up toward his father indicates that Goshen was on the ascent toward *Eretz Yisrael*. [In the literal sense, however, *Radak* and other commentators do not agree that the Egyptian Goshen is the same as the Goshen mentioned in *Joshua*.]

1. This interpretation reveals the insight of the Sages that not a moment is to be wasted of study: Jacob dispatched Judah so that as soon as he arrived in Goshen he could resume his studies without need for further preparation (*Vayaged Yaakov*).

Jacob was also setting an example for his descendants: The primary building in any new Jewish settlement is a Torah center. One cannot survive even a moment without Torah, and it is inconceivable that there be a Jewish settlement without a House of Torah from which teaching can emanate (*Iturei Torah*). [See footnote end of v. 29.]

ויגש כט ויבאו ארצה גשן: ויאסר יוסף מרכבתו
מו/כט ויעל לקראת-ישראל אביו גשנה וירא
אליו ויפל על-צואריו ויבך על-צואריו

And they arrived — ויבאו ארצה גשן
in the region of Goshen.

The syntax would imply that the subjects are Jacob and his family. According to *Alshich*, the subjects are Joseph and Judah who went together to Goshen to make the necessary preparations, after which Joseph went to meet his father.

29. Joseph reunites with Jacob.

[And] Joseph ויאסר יוסף מרכבתו
harnessed his chariot.

— Joseph personally harnessed the horses to the chariot in a display of eagerness to honor his father (*Rashi* from *Mechilta Beshallach*).

The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 105b) cites the case of Abraham who also, in a display of love [in that case, love of God], did not order one of his servants to saddle his donkey — an act normally beneath the dignity of a great man — but eagerly saddled his donkey personally [22:3]. This is because, *האהבה, מקלקלת את השורה*, 'love causes disregard of normal conduct.' [Conversely, the *Gemara* adds that 'hate, likewise, causes disregard of normal conduct,' as is deduced from Balaam who, in his hatred for Israel, also ignored his own dignity and saddled his own donkey (*Numbers* 22:21). See footnote on p. 790.]

According to *Ibn Ezra*, the literal implication of the phraseology is that Joseph ordered his chariot to be harnessed: Joseph harnessed — by command — his chariot. Comp. *I Kings* 6:4: Solomon built [i.e. not with his own hands, but ordered others to build] the house. The Torah often ascribes an act not to the one who performed the labor, but to the one who was its primary originator.

[*Rashi* cites the Midrashic interpretation as being contextually more reflective of the literal meaning of our passage since the Torah — which economizes on its every word — would not have informed us of the obvious fact that Joseph's wagons were harnessed unless it intended to suggest that Joseph did it personally out of filial love.]

And ויעל לקראת-ישראל אביו גשנה
went up to meet [lit. toward] Israel
his father in [lit. to] Goshen.

According to *Tur*, the singular ויעל indicates that Joseph went up alone. Just as Joseph harnessed his chariot personally in a display of filial piety, so did he ascend it [this being the connotation here of *went up*] unaided, in his anxiety to greet Jacob, unlike nobles, who wait for their servants to help them up. Furthermore, according to the opinion that Goshen is on the border of *Eretz Yisrael*, Joseph is described as going up since *Eretz Yisrael* is higher than other countries; while according to the more literal view that Goshen is in Egypt proper, then the term *went up* is used since Goshen was on higher terrain than the rest of the country [see previous verse, and v. 31 s.v. *אעלה*].

Daas Zekeinim interprets *went up* in the spiritual sense, noting that Joseph experienced a spiritual elevation by going to his father to honor him.

He appeared before וירא אֵלָיו
him.

[Joseph is still the subject:] Joseph appeared [i.e. presented himself] before his father (*Rashi*).¹¹

The significance of this seeming-

1. Jacob had said [45:28], *I shall go and see him before I die*. He also said [further v. 30], *Now, I can die after having seen your face*. Although the inner connotation of this emphasis on see-

²⁹ Joseph harnessed his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He appeared before him, fell on his neck, and he wept on his neck ex-

ly superfluous detail is explained by the commentators:

Either Israel's eyes were dim with age, or Joseph came in his royal chariot wearing a mitre on his head as is the custom of Egyptian kings: Therefore Jacob did not recognize him — just as the brothers had not recognized him when they had first seen him [42:8]. Therefore, the Torah mentions that he *appeared before his father*, who looked at him closely and only then recognized him (*Ramban*).

Sforno explains the term as: he *presented himself* from among his retinue, and did not wait for his father to approach the chariot.

The deeper implication of the phrase is that Joseph had nothing to hide when he saw his father. He was not like the wicked who, ashamed of his evil deeds, cringes in the presence of the righteous. Joseph maintained his righteousness throughout his years in Egypt and proudly presented himself to his father (*Alshich*).

According to *Targum Yonasan*, before Jacob recognized that the imposing regal figure approaching him was

ing is beyond our understanding, it is certain that Jacob had a special purpose and reason for it. That the Torah here mentions that Joseph *appeared* before Jacob, that is, was *seen* by him, indicates that this was the *seeing* that Jacob longed for before his death, (*Brisker Rav*). [See *Commentary* end of 45:28 and *Overview to Vayeishev* pp 15 64-67.]

Although Joseph longed to see Jacob as much as Jacob longed to see him, Joseph stifled his own desire and thought only of honoring his father's wish. Therefore *Rashi* comments that 'Joseph appeared before his father' — the purpose of his going was to please Jacob, not to satisfy his own longing (*Rav Avraham Trop*).

1. The concept of Jacob's reciting the *Shema* at that very moment reflects the Patriarch's supreme submission to HASHEM when a lesser person might have been overwhelmed with more mundane thoughts. He diverted the ecstatic love and joy which he experienced at his reunion with his long-lost favorite son — a love that enveloped him almost to the exclusion of all else — and instead directed them to the supreme object of his love: The Creator, blessed is He.

As *Maharal in Gur Aryeh* explains it: When the opportunity arises for the righteous to ex-

his son, Joseph, Jacob prostrated himself before him. In liability for allowing this to take place, Joseph's lifespan was shortened [he lived only 110 years and though he was the youngest of the brothers, he died first; see 50:26].

[Other opinions regarding Joseph's premature death are recorded in the *footnote* to 50:2; see also *Sechel Tov* *ibid.* v. 21 s.v. *אָנְכִי אֶבְלֶנָה*.]

וַיִּפֹּל עַל צַוְעָאֲרֵי עוֹד — [And he] fell on his neck and he wept on his neck excessively.

[The subject here, too, is Joseph:] He wept greatly and continuously — more than is usual, the word *עוֹד* meaning in this context *very much*, as it does in *Job* 34:23. Jacob, however, did not fall upon Joseph's neck, nor did he kiss him for, as the Sages [see below] say, Jacob was occupied with reciting the *Shema* at that moment (*Rashi*).¹¹

The source of this Aggadah is *Midrash Aggadah; Teshuvos HaGeonim* [Lyck ed.] 945 resp. 38. The Sages consistently give examples of how the Patriarchs prophetically fulfilled the Torah before it was given. See *comm.* to 26:5, p. 1083.

See also *Yoma* 19b: ... Concerning someone who, while reading the *Shema*, winks his eyes [in order to communicate with

וַיִּגְשׁ מוֹלַד וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יוֹסֵף אֲמֹתָהּ הִפַּעַם אַחֲרָי רְאוּתִי אֶת-פָּנֶיךָ כִּי עוֹדָה

someone), gesticulates with his lips, or points with his fingers. Scripture has said, *Not upon Me have you called, O Jacob [Isaiah 43:22].* Maharsha explains the allusion to be based on our Midrash and refers to Jacob who did not interrupt his recitation of the *Shema*. [See Overview].

Thus, following *Rashi*, the term *עוד* means *unremittingly*. Joseph wept copiously, and, when Jacob did not acknowledge him, he wept even more (*Akeidah; B'chor Shor*).

Ramban disagrees with *Rashi* and maintains that in the literal sense the subject of the phrase is not Joseph but the antecedent of the preceding pronoun *אָלָיו*, to him, i.e., Jacob — Jacob being the one who wept. He accordingly interprets: *And he [Jacob] fell on [Joseph's] neck and he [Jacob] wept ...*

He bases this on two considerations: a) according to *Rashi's* interpretation that the subject throughout is Joseph why does the Torah have to mention that *Joseph appeared to him* when it is obvious? b) It would not have been respectful

for Joseph to fall on his father's neck, rather he should have bowed to him as he does later in 48:12, or kiss his hands. Moreover, *Ramban* maintains that the word *עוד* in this context [which *Rashi* interprets as *excessively*] means *more; additionally*.

According to *Ramban*, therefore the verse is to be understood: ... *When he [Joseph] appeared to his father — whose eyesight was already failing — and his father, upon close scrutiny recognized him, then [his father] fell upon his [Joseph's] neck and wept on his neck עוד, more, i.e., in addition to the constant weeping of all the years they had been separated.*

Ramban sums up his interpretation by writing: 'It is quite well known whose tears are more present, the aged parent who finds his long-lost son alive after having despaired and mourned for him, or the young son who rules?'

press their sentiments of love, they do not want to keep these feelings of joy just for their own personal happiness, but they utilize them to pay tribute to God. Such was the case with Jacob. Just when he had the immense joy of finding the son whom he had believed lost, just as he sensed the flame of paternal love blaze up in his heart, he controlled his feelings and recited *Shema*, offering all his love to God. At this, the happiest hour of his life, he wanted to have but one thought: *וְאָהַבְתָּ אֹת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ. You shall love HASHEM, your God ...*

My father, *Harav Aharon Zlotowitz שליט"א*, notes that the Sages tell us of two people who recited *Shema* in pivotal moments in their lives: Jacob expressed his love for God at a moment of spiritual rebirth, when twenty-two years of uninterrupted mourning came to an end. R' Akiva recited *Shema* as he was being tortured to death by the Roman's to express his total love and dedication to God even as his life was being taken [*Berachos* 61b]. These two incidents symbolize the times when the Torah ordains that *Shema* be recited: in the morning when a new day begins, and at night when darkness encloses man and brings an end to his productive activity.

In a similar vein, *Harav David Cohen* notes that the Torah commands the recitation of *Shema* in the morning and evening. These periods represent the ending of a period or stage in life and beginning of a new one. At such times, *Shema* is recited to symbolize our acceptance and dedication of our lot and mission. Similarly, one recites the *Shema* with the approach of death to symbolize this concept.

The Sages in *Berachos* 5b advise that in order to conquer the Evil Inclination one should: a) study Torah; b) recite the *Shema*; c) recall the inevitable day of death. The Chortkover Rebbe once remarked that when entering the defiled land of Egypt Jacob availed himself of all three 'remedies': a) he sent Judah ahead to prepare a Torah center; b) he recited the *Shema*; and c) he recalled his day of death by saying *Now I can die...*

cessively. ³⁰ Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now I can die, after my having seen your face, because you are still alive."

The commentators vigorously defend Rashi's Rabbinic interpretation against Ramban's criticism, maintaining that it was quite properly a display of filial honor and devotion for Joseph, the viceroy in Egypt, to have fallen on his father's neck and wept. [See Mizrahi].

Regarding Ramban's comment that it is more natural to assume that the father would be weeping for his son than the reverse, R' David Feinstein notes how Joseph wept many times during the episode with his brothers, and it was quite in character for him, when he finally saw his beloved father from whom he had been forcefully separated these past twenty-two years, to burst into tears just as he did when he revealed himself to Benjamin.

The Hebrew word *neck* is in plural: he fell on both sides of his neck (*Sechel Tov*; see above 45:14).

30. וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יוֹסֵף — Then Israel said to Joseph.

According to Rashi's interpretation that the subject of the previous verse is Joseph, it is quite understandable that the Torah begins this verse by naming the new subject, Israel. According to Ramban, that the subject of the previous verse, too, is Israel, why shouldn't our verse begin *he*, without naming him again?

Ramban dismisses this objection by citing Scriptural cases where a subject is named again although he was the subject of the preceding passage. An example is 41:48 where Joseph is clearly the subject, yet 41:50 names him again. There are constantly many similar cases in the Torah and in other books of Scripture.

אֲמוֹתָהּ הִפְעֵם אֶחָרִי רְאוֹתִי אֶת-פָּנָיִךְ כִּי עוֹדֶךָ חַי — Now [lit. this time] I can die, after my having seen your face,

because you are still alive.

The Hebrew literally reads, *Now I will die ...* However, it is obvious that Jacob could not be wishing his own death!

Accordingly, our translation follows the implication of Rashi who writes that in the literal sense the passage is to be understood as Onkelos interprets it: *If I were to die now, I would die with the comforting knowledge that you are still alive.*

Alternatively Rashi cites the Midrash, which perceives the Hebrew to mean *I will die* [but] *one time*. Jacob said: "I had thought that I would die two deaths — both in this world and in the next — because the Divine Presence departed from me and I accordingly thought that God would hold me responsible for your death." [Jacob's apprehension was inspired by the fact that it was his favoritism to Joseph that caused his brothers to be jealous of him, and it was Jacob who sent Joseph on the ill-fated visit to his brothers in Shechem, notwithstanding the inherent danger such a mission involved (see Sforno 37:35).] "Now that you are alive, I will die only one death [i.e. a physical death — in this world — but not a spiritual death in the Hereafter since I can no longer be held responsible for anyone's death" (Mizrahi)].

Furthermore, by this declaration Jacob was retracting his earlier fear. For when he had been told that Joseph was dead, he had cried out: "I will go down to Sh'eol [the grave, i.e., Gehinnom] mourning for my son" (37:35). As Rashi records there, Jacob had been given a Divine omen that if none of his

ויגש מו/לא-לב לא חי: ויאמר יוסף אל-אחיו ואל-בית אביו
אעלה ואגידה לפרעה ואמרה אליו
אחי ובית-אבי אשר בארץ-כנען באו
לב אלי: והאנשים רעי צאן כיי-אנשי מקנה

sons died during his lifetime, he may be assured that he would not see *Gehinnom*. As long as he thought Joseph was dead, Jacob was convinced that he would descend as a mourner to *Gehinnom*, and this apprehension haunted him all the years that he mourned Joseph's 'death.' But now, however, that Jacob saw with his own eyes that his son was alive, he no longer feared punishment in *Gehinnom*, and therefore, exclaimed, 'Inasmuch as I have seen that you are still alive, I no longer fear *Gehinnom*. Now I can die knowing that punishment does not await me in the Hereafter!'

Maskil l'David cites this interpretation and offers that *Rashi* does not mention it here since Jacob still had no assurance that none of his sons would die before him, thereby removing his assurance against *Gehinnom*. *Rashi* therefore focuses his interpretation on the aspect of Jacob's apprehension that God will hold him accountable for Joseph's 'death', a fear that was no longer applicable.

Sforno suggests that Jacob was praying that he die before any fresh sorrows come upon him, for his earlier salvation had always been followed by more sorrows.

Many commentators interpret חי [alive] to imply *spiritually vigorous*, in the same sense that the righteous are called חיים, 'alive.' They maintain Kabbalistically that from merely looking at Joseph's face the Patriarch was able to discern that his son still maintained his righteousness; untainted by the depravities of Egypt. Jacob therefore used the word הַפֶּעַם, *this time*, to imply that he could feel such confidence only after having seen Joseph, not earlier when he was merely informed verbally that Joseph was still alive.

As *Or HaChaim* elaborates, though Jacob's joy was great at this moment, his happiness remained incomplete as

long as he had not assured himself of one fact: that Joseph had maintained a high standard of piety, both as a slave and as a viceroy. How can one rejoice at rediscovering a son who has abandoned his faith and his fear of God? But Jacob could recognize the spiritual state of an individual by looking at his features, so it was sufficient for him 'to see Joseph's face' in order to assure himself that he had remained pure and pious. 'Now,' he exclaimed, 'I can die in peace, since I have seen your face [and know] that you are yet alive,' in the sense that 'only the righteous are truly alive' [*Berachos* 18a; see commentary to 45:28, and footnote above, v. 29].

Others see this outburst of emotion as implying: 'I could die this moment from the excessive joy I am experiencing from seeing you! The emotion is more than I can bear!' (*Akeidah*).

[Though the reader naturally wonders what Joseph said during the reunion, the Torah omits it. As we know the Torah records historical facts only if they have eternal significance. We can only assume that the further conversation between Jacob and Joseph did not fit into this category.]

31. Joseph ensures his family's settlement in Goshen.

Although Pharaoh had offered Joseph's family the choicest part of Egypt — a reference, apparently to Goshen, as is evident from 45:13 (see *Rashi*) and 47:6 — he had not specifically designated Goshen. Accordingly, Joseph takes leave of his family, explaining that he must go to Pharaoh to arrange their settlement in Goshen (*R' Shmuel b. Chofni*; *R' Avraham b. HaRambam*; *Tzror HaMor*).

— ויאמר יוסף אל-אחיו ואל-בית אביו
And Joseph said to his brothers and

46 ³¹ And Joseph said to his brothers and to his
31-32 brothers' household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh,
and I will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's
household who were in the land of Canaan have
come to me. ³² The men are shepherds, for they have

to his father's household.

His brothers are specifically mentioned, because they were directly concerned; it was they whom Pharaoh would summon (*Radak*).

Although transient shepherds were permitted to graze their herds wherever they wished, people wishing permanent residence required Pharaoh's permission. Now, Joseph was apprehensive that Pharaoh might insist that Joseph's family live in the metropolis and become public officials [something clearly undesirable as far as Joseph was concerned (see *comm.* to v. 32 below)]. Joseph therefore took the initiative of informing Pharaoh that his brothers were shepherds, so that he would have them settle in the out-of-the-way region of Goshen since all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians. Joseph chose his words carefully to achieve this desired goal of obtaining an isolated province for their home (*Malbim*).

Chiddushei HaRim remarks that Joseph was thereby establishing a pattern for his descendants to follow in every generation: Do not seek the grace of gentile rulers; neither emulate their ways nor mingle with them socially. Joseph knew that shepherds were detested by Egypt, yet he openly told Pharaoh that his brothers were shepherds in order to separate them from the Egyptians and in order that they should be settled in a separate region.

אֶעֱלֶה וְאֹנִידָה לְפָרְעָה — I will go up and tell Pharaoh.

I.e., I will offer this information to Pharaoh before he requests it (*Sforno*).

'Go up' is here to be understood in the sense of ascending the chariot. He was humbly asking their leave (*Daas Zekenim*; *Tur* v. 29).

[These interpretations are based on v. 29 where the implication is that Goshen was on higher terrain than the rest of Egypt. Therefore, the expression go up in our passage cannot imply from Goshen to Egypt.]

According to *Haamek Davar*, by go up, Joseph meant that he would go to Pharaoh's private upper chamber — where only Joseph could visit the king.

According to *HaRechesim LeBik'ah*, a mountain range separated Goshen from the rest of Egypt. Therefore, the term go up applies when traveling in either direction.

וְאָמַרְהָ אֵלָיו אֲחִי וּבֵיתִי אֲבִי אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ — And I will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me.

— To settle permanently, for which Pharaoh's permission was necessary (*Abraham*).

Joseph would not mention, however, that they were already in Goshen (*Ralbag*).

וְהָאֲנָשִׁים רְעִי צֹאן כִּי אֲנֹשִׁי מִקֶּנָּה הֵיוּ — And the men are shepherds, for they have been cattlemen.

That is, their wealth consists of cattle. Joseph thereby described them in an honorable way and emphasized that they were shepherds — not merely in the menial sense that they tended the cattle of others [as was Jacob when he shepherded

ויוגש מו/לג-לד הָיוּ וְצֹאנָם וּבְקָרָם וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם
 ג הָבִיאוּ: וְהָיָה כִּי-יִקְרָא לָכֶם פְּרָעָה וְאָמַר
 ד מֶה-מַּעֲשֵׂיכֶם: וְאָמַרְתֶּם אֲנָשֵׁי מִקְנֶה הָיוּ
 עֲבָדֶיךָ מִנְּעוּרֵינוּ וְעַד-עַתָּה גַם-אֲנַחְנוּ
 וְגַם-אֲבֹתֵינוּ בְּעֶבֶר תִּשְׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ גִּשְׁן כִּי-
 א תוֹעֲבַת מִצְרַיִם כָּל-רְעָה צֹאן: וַיָּבֹא יוֹסֵף

Laban's sheep] — but that they owned many herds of their own, and even with respect to their own cattle, they had servants and attendants to pasture them. They were men of esteem and means (*Ramban*).^[1]

This verse is not a paranthetical Scriptural insertion to clarify the narrative, but is part of what Joseph would tell Pharaoh (*Rashi*; *Rashbam*).

וְצֹאנָם וּבְקָרָם וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם הָבִיאוּ — *And their sheep and cattle — and everything they own [lit. that is theirs] — they have brought.*

Thus they are independently wealthy and will not require support from the royal treasury (*Malbim*).

That they brought all their flocks and cattle proves that they came to reside here permanently and serve the monarch (*R' Avraham b. HaRambam*; *Sechel Tov*).

33. וְהָיָה כִּי יִקְרָא לָכֶם פְּרָעָה וְאָמַר מֶה-מַּעֲשֵׂיכֶם — *And it shall be, when Pharaoh summons you [or: if Pharaoh should summon you] and says, 'What is your occupation?'*

— His intention being to ascertain for which governmental post you are suited (*Malbim*).

As *R' Hirsch* explains, in a state like Egypt, where men were irrevocably locked into the trade or profession of their fathers, the first question would naturally be about their profession.

34. וְאָמַרְתֶּם אֲנָשֵׁי מִקְנֶה הָיוּ — *Then you are to say, 'Your servants have been cattlemen from our youth till now.'*

It is the family occupation (*Sechel Tov*).

— And we know no other (*Malbim*).

Joseph thus cautioned them that the general tenor of their response must correspond to his, and he rehearsed their answer so they would not flounder. It was obvious that they could not categorically refuse to enter Pharaoh's service, but their response was calculated to make them seem unqualified for his needs (*Akeidah*).

To Pharaoh's question they were to acknowledge immediately and unashamedly that they were shep-

1. The Patriarchal occupation.

According to *R' Bachya*, two reasons prompted Jacob's children and the most illustrious people of the Bible to become shepherds. First, this profession is healthy and profitable. Secondly, it minimizes association with idolaters who, because they worship sheep, consider herdsmen to be loathsome (*Rashi*, v. 34). Thus, shepherds live in relative isolation, close to pasture-land and far from large settlements.

This has two advantages: being alone, the shepherd can better safeguard his spiritual and religious heritage, and can better avoid the many vices of the sophisticated social life of big

46 been cattlemen. Their sheep and cattle — and
33-34 everything they own — they have brought.’³³ And it
shall be, when Pharaoh summons you, and says,
‘What is your occupation?’³⁴ Then you are to say,
‘Your servants have been cattlemen from our youth
till now, both we and our forefathers,’ so that you
may be able to stay on the region of Goshen, since all
shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians.”

herds, a profession the Egyptians held in undisguised contempt. Pharaoh’s resultant wish to isolate them in a faraway province would be a significant means of preserving the nation that was destined to flourish in isolation throughout its history (R’ Hirsch).

They were not to apply to themselves the more demeaning term רועי צאן, *shepherds*, since Pharaoh would already know this from Joseph’s words. They were merely to say מְקַנְהוּ, *cattlemen*, stressing the business, rather than the menial, nature of the profession (Haamek Davar).

[They did not precisely follow this advice however. See *comm.* to 47:1-3.]

גַּם־אֲנָחוּנוּ גַּם־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ — *Both we and our forefathers.*

They were to mention their forefathers, who were widely known by then, and held in high esteem. Witness Abraham who was renowned as a ‘Prince of God’ [23:6] (Akeidas Yitzchak).

cities — gossip, slander, depravity, thievery, hypocrisy, and falsehood. Being a shepherd allows one to be alone, far from men and their evil ways — and for this, the righteous and the prophets have always searched. It answers their wish to devote themselves to a meditative, austere, and holy way of life which would elevate them until they reached to the Source of divine inspiration (R’ Munk).

As R’ Hirsch (4:2) writes, pastoral life has many advantages. The fact that shepherds are involved with dependent living creatures calls for the exercise of humane feelings and constant care. The unstable nature of a shepherd’s property is a safeguard against placing too much value on both the property and its owner. Less physical exertion is required than in agriculture; the mind is less occupied by the work and is free to think Godliness and goodness. Thus we find that our Patriarchs were shepherds, and Moses and David tended flocks.

The Egyptians hated pastoral people. Their civilization was based on agriculture and

[The Hebrew literally reads *also we, also our fathers*. This double use of גם, *also*, is idiomatic. See, for example, 24:19; 32:19; 43:8; 44:10.]

וְשָׁכְנוּ בְּרֵגֶל גֹּשֶׁן — *So that you may be able to stay in the region of Goshen.*

I.e., giving Pharaoh the response that your sole occupation for generations has been trading in cattle will assure that Pharaoh will settle you in Goshen (Malbim).

— Away from the mainstream of the immoral Egyptians. It was this separateness that would help preserve them from assimilation in Egypt (Akeidah).

This is the area that you require since it is grazing land. And when you say that you are not versed in any other work, he will send you far away from himself and settle you there (Rashi).

כִּי־תֹעֲבֹד מִצְרִים כָּל־רֹעֶה צֹאן — *Since all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians* [lit. *for the abomination of Egypt is every shepherd*].

And since you are shepherds,

וַיִּגְדַּל לְפָרְעֹה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִי וְאֶחָי וְצֹאנָם
וּבְקֶרֶם וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם כְּנָעַן

ויגש
מזא

Pharaoh will not settle you in the urban centers. In this way Joseph contrived to achieve the goal that they should dwell apart, though it involved degrading the family in Pharaoh's eyes. Everything was worth sacrificing in order to ensure the preservation of Israel's sanctity (*Haamek Davar*).

Shepherds were abhorrent to Egyptians – because the Egyptians worshipped sheep (*Rashi*), and would therefore not tolerate slaughtering sheep or deriving benefit from them (*Abarbanel*).

It is apparent, however, from 47:6 and *Exodus* 9:3 that the Egyptians had flocks of their own. It seems probable that they would raise them only in consecrated fields. They would never strike them, or dare slaughter them except on the rarest occasions. Egyptians therefore hated [foreign] shepherds who recognize so clearly that sheep, which the Egyptians worshiped, are not gods (*Akeidah; Alshich; Sechel Tov; cf. Radak*).

R' Abraham ben HaRambam cites with approval *R' Shmuel b. Chofni's* comment that the Egyptians did not despise shepherds *per se*, but only those who slaughtered the sheep in their care.

As *Ibn Ezra* explains, the Egyp-

tians in those days were not meat-eaters, and would not permit anyone to kill sheep. This is still the custom in India. All shepherds were held in contempt because they drank sheep's milk. To this day, the Hindus of India do not drink or eat anything derived from living creatures. [Indians believed they are descended from Ham, as are the Egyptians; in those days they shared common beliefs (*Yohel Or*)].

Rashbam, in an opposing view, holds that the Egyptians did not venerate sheep. He maintains that they found shepherds contemptible since Egyptians *despised* sheep, both as food and for sacrifices, as it is written [*Exodus* 8:22]: *For we will sacrifice that which is loathed by the Egyptians*.

There is yet another opinion. The Torah frequently refers to idols with the derogatory word תּוֹעֵבָה [*abomination; abhorrence*]. According to this opinion, Joseph's intent was that Egyptians should honor his brothers since they cared for the animals that Egypt worshiped. Pharaoh, accordingly, would want them to dwell in a fertile region like Goshen (see 45:18). Those who hold this opinion find it inconceivable that Joseph should present his brothers as objects of contempt (*Zohar; B'chor Shor*).

manifested many base symptoms – from slavery and polytheism to total disregard for human dignity. Only in our ancestors, that tribe of shepherds, were faith in God, freedom, and man's likeness to his Creator to be found. The Egyptian leaders had good reason to cultivate in their subjects an overwhelming aversion to pastoral peoples.

It is true that agricultural life is more natural to man than pastoral life, and, indeed, the Torah's many commandments regarding agriculture indicate that this applies to Israel as well. But by its commandments regarding the Sabbath, the Sabbatical year, the laws of tithing, and similar laws, the Torah protects Jewry against the excesses that lead to the worship of property. As a result of these laws, the Torah creates the basis of an agricultural state that serves God, of a nation united in fraternity and freedom. Without the Torah, the very existence of these ideals is threatened.

47 ¹ Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and he said,
1 "My father and my brothers, their sheep, their cattle,
and everything they own, have arrived from the land

XLVII

1¹4. Joseph's report to Pharaoh — variations in the dialogue.

In the previous chapter [46:31-34] Joseph told his brothers how he would announce their arrival and how they should describe themselves to Pharaoh. In the next four verses, however, we find that both Joseph and his brothers made slight changes when they actually spoke to the king. Is there any significance in these variations?

A similar question arose in several earlier cases where the Torah recapitulated dialogue. Among these cases are: Eliezer's recapitulation to Rebecca's family of his experiences at the well [24:34-39; see chart on pp. 986-7]; when Hamor, father of Shechem, reported on the proposal to intermarry and unite with Jacob's family, he deliberately misled his own subjects to make the arrangements palatable [34:21-33]; Potiphar's wife falsified to Joseph's disadvantage her account of their confrontation [see chart on p. 1714]; and Pharaoh's account to Joseph of his dreams differed from the Torah's account [41:17-24; see chart on pp. 1774-6].

As noted in the commentaries to the above narratives, there are two schools of thought among the commentators. Such commentators as *Ibn Ezra*, *Radak*, and occasionally *Ramban*, find little if no new significance in such minor variations. As *Radak* puts it, when a person reports an event or conversation, he invariably varies the wording, adding or subtracting as he sees fit, but preserving the essential content. Since such changes are characteristic of narrative, there is no point in seeking specific reasons for such changes provided they do not affect the content.

However, the Midrash, *Zohar* and most later commentators, such as *Or HaChaim*, *Abarbanel*, and *Haamek Davar* perceive great significance in such variations, even minor ones. In their view, it is axiomatic that the Torah would not have repeated a narrative unless the recapitulation contained a new teaching. In the case of Joseph and Pharaoh, for example, unless there was significance in the variations in dialogue, the Torah should have told us simply in a few words that Joseph and his brothers spoke to Pharaoh as planned. That it did not do so — and especially since there are differences between the plan and the execution — requires us to make careful comparisons and seek reasons for any changes.

The commentary below shall point out these interpretations.

1. וַיָּבֹא יוֹסֵף וַיְגִיד לְפָרֹעַ — Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh.

It does not say he went up to Pharaoh's private, upper-level chamber [see 46:31], for Providence arranged it that when Joseph arrived he found Pharaoh below, with his officials. That he was not addressing Pharaoh privately, but in the presence of the court officials, accounts in part for changes in Joseph's planned dialogue (*Haamek Davar*).

וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וְאֶחָיו וְצֹאֲנָם וְבָקָרָם וְכָל
[And] he said, My father and my brothers,

and their sheep, [and] their cattle,
and everything they own [lit. that is theirs], have arrived from the land of Canaan.

As you commanded them (*Or HaChaim*; see below).

In speaking to Pharaoh, Joseph did not say 'have come to me' as he proposed [46:31] lest Pharaoh suspect that they expected Joseph to support them out of the royal treasury. To further disabuse Pharaoh of the notion that the new arrivals were poor and would

ויגש
מזכיר
ב והנם בארץ גשן: ומקצה אחיו לקח
חמשה אנשים ויצגם לפני פרעה:
ג ויאמר פרעה אל-אחיו מה מעשיכם

become public charges, he added *and their sheep, their cattle, and everything they own, have arrived*, to emphasize that they were wealthy. Joseph thus changed the wording according to his perception at that moment of what would be most effective (*Akeidah*; *Abarbanel*).

And they are now in the region of Goshen.

Joseph added this fact — though he did not mention it to his brothers [46:31] — in order to prompt Pharaoh in the right direction. As *Or HaChaim* explains: ‘*And they are in the region of Goshen, as you (Pharaoh) commanded when you said [45:18]: “And I shall give you the best of the land of Egypt” — the region of Goshen, which possesses the best pasture land of the country.*’

Joseph did not say explicitly that they were shepherds or cattlemen, letting Pharaoh infer this for himself; furthermore, the courtiers who were present did not know that Joseph’s brothers were shepherds and, since this occupation was despised in Egypt, Joseph avoided describing them as such (*Abarbanel*; *Haamek Davar*).

2. ומקצה אחיו לקח חמשה אנשים — *From the least of his brothers he took five men.*

From the weakest of them — from those who did not look robust; because if Pharaoh saw powerful men, he would have enlisted them as soldiers (*Rashi*).

That he selected the weaker brothers is implied by the term *מקצה*, literally *and from the ‘end’* [i.e., least (physically) significant, (*Midrash*)] of his brothers. Otherwise, the Torah would have said simply *ומאחיו לקח וכו’* and from his brothers he took, etc. (*Be’er Yitzchak*; *Beer Mayim Chaim*; *Shaarei Aharon*).

Rashi continues that there is a difference of opinion among the Sages regarding the identity of these five. According to the *Midrash Rabbah* ‘which is the *Aggadah* of *Eretz Yisrael*’ [it was compiled by the third century Palestinian amora *R’ Hoshai*], the ‘weaker’ brothers chosen were: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, and Benjamin. [We know that these were not the mighty brothers, because, as the *Midrash* explains,] these were the brothers whose names Moses did not repeat when he blessed the Tribes before his death [*Deut.* 33], whereas Moses did repeat the names of the more powerful brothers: [*Deut.* 33:7] *And this is for Judah ... hear, HASHEM, the voice of Judah*; [*ibid.* v. 20] *And of Gad he said ... Blessed be He Who extended Gad*; [*ibid.* v. 25] *And of Naftali he said, Naftali ...*; [*ibid.* v. 22] *And of Dan he said, Dan ...*; similarly he repeated the names of Zebulun [*ibid.* v. 18] and of Asher [*ibid.* v. 24].

“According to our Babylonian Talmud, however [*Bava Kamma* 92a],” *Rashi* continues, “those whose names Moses did mention twice were the weaker of the brothers and it was they whom Joseph brought before Pharaoh.” [The difference in both interpretations involves only one point: The

47 of Canaan and they are now in the region of Goshen."
 2-3 ² From the least of his brothers he took five men and
 presented them to Pharaoh. ³ Pharaoh said to his
 brothers, "What is your occupation?" They answered

Midrash and Talmud both agree that repetition alludes to strength. However, the Midrash maintains that Moses repeated certain names to attest that these were *already* strong, while the Talmud maintains that Moses' repetition was really a supplication that henceforth these (weaker) brothers should become strong (*Divrei David*).]

According to the latter interpretations that the 'weaker' brothers taken by Joseph were the ones whose names were repeated, there is a difficulty since Moses repeated the names of six brothers, whereas Joseph took only five with him. — The answer given is that Judah was not brought to Pharaoh; Moses doubled Judah's name not because he was weak but because he required a special blessing as the Talmud explains in *Makkos* 11b and *Bava Kamma* 92a (*Rashi*).

[As the Talmud explains, Judah's bones knew no rest nor did his soul find a place of honor in the Heavenly Academy because he had placed himself under a ban when he promised to return Benjamin to Jacob — a ban which still was technically in force (see footnote to 43:9). Therefore Moses repeated Judah's name in supplication.]

In summation, it is clear that both the Midrash and Talmud agree that Joseph brought the weaker brothers to Pharaoh; however, their identity is in dispute. According to the Midrash, the Tribes whose names Moses did not repeat (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar and Benjamin) were the weaker ones, and hence [except for Manasseh and Ephraim whose names also were not repeated] they were the five brothers whom Joseph brought; while according

to the Talmud, those whose names Moses *did* repeat (Judah, Dan, Zebulun, Gad, Asher, and Naftali) were the weaker brothers — except for Judah, as the Gemara explains.

Tur, however, interprets that, to the contrary, the word מִקְצָה is related to קָצַן, leader; Joseph took five of his most prominent brothers. *Radak* records a similar view as does *Tz'ror HaMor*.

The implication of *Onkelos* is that the literal sense of the word מִקְצָה has nothing to do with strength or weakness, but is simply synonymous with מִקְצָה, some, the meaning of our passage being: And he took some of his brothers, five men, etc. [Cf. also *R' Shmuel ben Chofni Gaon; Raabam*.]

וַיָּצֵגוּ לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה — And [he] presented them to Pharaoh.

Joseph wanted Pharaoh to see for himself, from their words and general demeanor, that they were suitable only for shepherding (*Sforno*).

The phrase literally reads, and he stood them up before Pharaoh. The verb וַיָּצֵגוּ from נָצַג, as above in 43:10 means stand or set up. The term suggests physical support; its use here, as *Sechel Tov* observes, implies that Joseph had them stand in a humble manner, showing no sign of strength, so that Pharaoh would not enlist them as soldiers. *R' Hirsch* perceives that the verb connotes that he placed them at Pharaoh's disposal, which is similar to the meaning of the verb אָצִיגֶנָּה, let me assign, in 33:15.

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-אֶחָיו מִה מְעֹשֶׂיכֶם.
 — [And] Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?"

[See 46:33.]

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה רַעַה צֹאן עֲבָדֶיךָ גַּם־
ר אֲנַחְנוּ גַם־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה
לָגוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן כִּי־אֵין מְרֹעָה לְצֹאן
אֲשֶׁר לְעֲבָדֶיךָ כִּי־כִבֵּד הָרַעַב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן
וַעֲתָה יִשְׁבוּ־נָא עֲבָדֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ גִּשְׁן:
ה וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר אָבִיךָ
ו וְאֶחָיֶךָ בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ: אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לִפְנֶיךָ

רעה צאן עבדיך גם־אנחנו גם־אבותינו
— *Your servants are shepherds, we as well as our [lit. also we also our] forefathers.*

There is a significant variation here as well. Joseph had instructed them to emphasize that they were *אנשי מקנה*, *cattlemen*, emphasizing, as *Ramban* observes there, that they did not work for others, but owned their own flocks. But the brothers omitted this and said simply, *your servants are shepherds*.

As *R' Hirsch* points out, *רעה צאן* [lit. *shepherd*] is in the singular: We, your servants, belong to the shepherd class. Notwithstanding what Joseph had told them to say, they were not ashamed of their profession and said straight out: *shepherds*.

4. וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה — *And they said to Pharaoh.*

I.e., sensing that Pharaoh was unresponsive, they added ... (*Abarbanel*; *Malbim*).

לָגוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — *We have come to sojourn in this [lit. the] land.*

I.e., to live here temporarily as *גרים*, *aliens*; *sojourners* [see below]. The brothers thereby presented themselves as humbly seeking Pharaoh's good will, not as if they were claiming any privileges by virtue of his promise to Joseph [in 45:18] (*Or HaChaim*).

They had left *Eretz Yisrael* most reluctantly, perceiving their departure as a form of *exile* (*Chidah*).

The implication was that as temporary residents, they could not be expected to change their occupation (*Akeidah*).

— כִּי אֵין מְרֹעָה לְצֹאן אֲשֶׁר לְעֲבָדֶיךָ וכו' — *Since there is no grazing [pasture] for your servants' sheep, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan.*

This had forced them to leave *Canaan* temporarily, but they would return home when the famine was over (*Ramban* v. 11; *Abarbanel*).

Comp. the *Passover Haggadah*: "... *Then my father [Jacob] descended to Egypt and sojourned there ... [Deut. 26:5].* — This teaches that our father Jacob did not descend to Egypt to settle, but only to sojourn temporarily, as it says, *They said to Pharaoh: 'We have come to sojourn in this land since there is no pasture for your servants' sheep, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan.'*"

Ramban questions the rationale of their telling Pharaoh that they had come to Egypt for the duration of the famine since the famine was severe in *Canaan*, inasmuch as the famine was equally severe in *Egypt*, or possibly even more severe since the brunt of the decree was on *Egypt*.

He explains that they intended to

47 Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds — we as well as
4-6 our forefathers." ⁴ And they said to Pharaoh, "We have come to sojourn in this land, since there is no grazing for your servants' sheep, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, if you please, allow your servants to dwell in the region of Goshen."

⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph as follows, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. ⁶ The land of Egypt is before you — in the best part of the land

imply that in Canaan people were forced to eat even the grass of the fields leaving virtually no sustenance for livestock, so severe was the famine, but in Egypt there was still some grass in the pastures because the people subsisted on Joseph's stores of grain. It is also possible that in Egypt there was some pasture in the marshes because of the canals and ponds, whereas Canaan was totally dependent upon rain and there was no verdure. [See also *Deut.* 11:10].

וַעֲתָה יִשְׁבוּנָא עֲבָדֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן — [And] now, if you please, allow your servants to dwell in the region of Goshen.

Now, until the famine will end by Divine grace — for then we will return home (*Alshich; Chizkuni*).

Therefore, under the circumstances, let your servants dwell, that is remain, in the region of Goshen where we have already taken up temporary residence, and where the land is suitable for grazing (*Akeidah*).

5. וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר — [And] Pharaoh said to Joseph as follows [lit. saying].

Pharaoh did not respond directly to the brothers' request, but turned and directed his remarks to Joseph, his viceroy (*Abarbanel*; see *Or HaChaim* below).

אָבִיךָ וְאֶחָיִךָ בָּאוּ אֵלַיךְ — Your father and your brothers have come to you.

The statement is introductory, as if to say, 'I have now learned that your family has arrived here.' The implication of the words to you is that it is apparent that they have come to you, depending on you because of your lofty position. Therefore, see that you treat them well since it is entirely within your power to do so (*Ramban*).

Joseph had not said, 'have come to me' as he originally intended, [see 46:31, 47:1] because he wanted to give Pharaoh the impression that his family had come in response to the royal invitation (45:17ff). Pharaoh, however, wished to intimate that Joseph's family had come to him, Joseph, and that he should allot them land. Among Pharaoh's reasons for this was that according to Egyptian custom had Pharaoh bestowed the gift it would have been irrevocable, while if it were bestowed by Joseph — although at the king's pleasure — it could be revoked at some future date by the throne (*Or HaChaim*).

6. אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לִפְנֶיךָ הִוא — The land of Egypt is before you.

I.e., is open before you. You can act with full authority to do as you please without seeking my further

הוא במיטב הארץ הושב את־אביו
 ואת־אחיו ישבו בארץ גשן ואם־יִרְעָתָ
 ויש־בם אנשי־חיל ושמִתֶּם שָׂרֵי מִקְנֵה
 עַל־אֲשֶׁר־לִי: וַיָּבֹא יוֹסֵף אֶת־יַעֲקֹב אָבִיו
 וַיַּעֲמְדֵהוּ לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב אֶת־

permission (*Akeidah; Haamek Davar*).

This was Pharaoh's way of displaying his gratitude for Joseph's loyal and devoted service (*Ibn Caspi*).

במיטב הארץ הושב את־אביו ואת־אחיו
 — In the best part of the land settle your father and your brothers.

'The king's heart is in the hands of HASHEM' [Prov. 21:1]. Joseph's fear that Pharaoh would find his brothers detestable as shepherds was unfounded. Providence inspired Pharaoh to offer them the very best part of Egypt, notwithstanding other interests of the State which might have dictated that he take advantage of their reduced status (*Tz'ror HaMor; Haamek Davar*).

By הושב, settle, Pharaoh meant: Provide them with everything they could possibly need — houses, fields, vineyards, etc. — in the manner of Egyptian citizens who reside in Goshen (*Ramban v. 11*).

ישבו בארץ גשן — Let them settle in the region of Goshen.

— In accordance with their wishes. 'Whatever one wishes for

himself, is his honor and benefit' (*Haamek Davar*).

— I consider Goshen the choicest region in Egypt (*Or HaChaim*).^[1]

ואם־יִרְעָתָ ויש־בם אנשי־חיל — And if you know that there are capable men among them.

And if you know. That is, if you wish to know it. You may prefer to ignore your brothers' talents because you would rather that they not become government officials. Thus, Pharaoh himself gives Joseph an excuse to free his brothers from royal service (*R' Hirsch*).

The translation of חיל as capable [or: accomplished] men, follows Rashi, who interprets: 'skilled in their profession of feeding sheep.'

The term literally means men of strength and usually refers to soldiers — a connotation it cannot have here inasmuch as it would contradict Rashi's earlier contention that Joseph brought his weaker brothers. Moreover, Pharaoh proceeds to suggest that such persons become chamberlains of his livestock, not soldiers — but if Pharaoh meant men of strength, they would have been better suited to the military than shepherdry. This meaning of capable also occurs in Proverbs 31:10 where Solomon describes the proverbial

1. *Moshav Zekeinim* notes that the Talmud [*Kesubos* 112a] describes Zoan, not Goshen, as the choicest part of Egypt [see *Rashi* to *Numbers* 13:22]; he leaves the question unresolved.

[Possibly, Pharaoh intimated that he would prefer that they settle in the choicest part of Egypt — presumably Zoan — but since the brothers specifically requested Goshen, they may remain there. (They specified Goshen because as the Midrash records, the Pharaoh of Abraham's time had presented Goshen to Sarah.) This might also be *Haamek Davar's* understanding of the text as well.

[Moreover, there are some commentators who suggest that Zoan is to be identified with Raameses; see *comm.* to *Numb.* 13:22].

47 settle your father and your brothers. Let them settle in
7 the region of Goshen, and if you know that there are
 capable men among them, appoint them as
 chamberlains over the livestock that belongs to me."

Then Joseph brought Jacob, his father, and
 presented him to Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

אִשָּׁת חַיִּל, accomplished woman; in that
 context, too, it certainly does not refer
 to a military or powerful woman
 (Shaarei Aharon).

According to Chizkuni, אִשָּׁת חַיִּל does
 mean, even in our context, powerful
 men, since shepherds must be powerful
 to ward off wild beasts and robbers.

וְשָׂמָתָם שָׂרֵי מִקְנֵה עַל-אֲשֶׁר-לִי —
 [And] appoint them [as]
 chamberlains over the livestock that
 belongs to me.

I.e., over my sheep (Rashi).

[As noted above, sheep was raised in
 Egypt, but not for food. See 46:34 for
 this and other opinions.]

According to Ibn Ezra, מִקְנֵה
 livestock, refers to the royal herds
 of horses and mules [used for
 military purposes.]

Ibn Caspi suggests that the
 meaning of שָׂרֵי מִקְנֵה is livestock
 chamberlains, that is, chamberlains
 over the shepherds — certainly a
 position reflecting the dignity of
 Joseph's brothers.

Cf. Rashbam: People worthy of
 power and authority.

The Torah does not record
 whether or not they accepted this
 duty. It is probable that they did not
 inasmuch as they were trying to
 maintain a humble posture (Sechel
 Tov).

7. Joseph presents Jacob to Pharaoh.

וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת-יַעֲקֹב אָבִיו — Then
 Joseph brought Jacob his father.

Joseph meant to reflect honor on
 himself by his venerable father's

obvious distinction (Sechel Tov).

Note the use of the more honorable term
 לָקַח, brought, used here, rather than
 תָּקַח, took, used in the case of his brothers in v. 2
 (R' Hirsch).

וַיַּעֲמֵדָהּ לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה — And presented
 him to Pharaoh.

Here, too, as in v. 2 above, the
 passage literally reads and he stood
 him up before Pharaoh. While the
 idiomatic meaning in both verses is
 he presented, different Hebrew
 verbs for stood up are used. In v. 2
 the verb עָמַד is used, while here the
 verb עָמַד is used.

R' Hirsch perceives the verb עָמַד
 in our passage to denote a dignified
 standing "on equal footing" before
 Pharaoh. Jacob is a spiritual prince
 on earth and meets Pharaoh as an
 equal by blessing him in greeting.

Following the Mesorah,
 [traditional spelling as found in
 Torah Scrolls], according to which
 וַיַּעֲמֵדָהּ is spelled 'defectively'
 [without the י after the מ], Baal
 HaTurim perceives to the contrary
 that Jacob's standing here was
 'defective.' He was extremely old
 and Joseph had to support him.

וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב אֶת-פַּרְעֹה — And Jacob
 blessed Pharaoh.

'Blessed' here denotes a greeting
 of peace as is customary with all
 who occasionally present them-
 selves before kings (Rashi).

Rashi pursues this interpretation because
 Jacob is described as blessing Pharaoh twice
 — here and in v. 10. Therefore he construes
 the 'blessing' in the first instance to denote
 greeting, whereas in the second instance he

ויגש מִזֶּחֱי וַיֹּאמֶר פֶּרְעָה: וַיֵּעָקֵב אֶל־יַעֲקֹב כַּמָּה יָמִי
ט שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי: וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־פֶּרְעָה יָמִי
שְׁנֵי מְגֹרֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה מֵעַט
וְרַעִים הָיוּ יָמִי שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי וְלֹא הִשְׁיֵגוּ אֶת־
יָמִי שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי אֲבֹתִי בְיָמֵי מְגֹרֵיהֶם: וַיִּבְרַךְ

interprets it in its usual sense of blessing (Divrei David).

Comp. 33:11 where Rashi explains that the term *blessing* used in instances of meeting someone has the sense of *greeted* [and he cites our passage]: in old French: *saluer* [=salute]. See also *Haksav* v. 'aKabbalah to 32:30. Radak interprets s. 'arly, citing II Kings 4:29 where ברך also means greet rather than bless.

Ramban disagrees with Rashi that 'blessing' in this passage refers to salutation, inasmuch as it is not royal protocol for a commoner to greet a king, as the Sages have said [Shabbos 89a]: 'May a servant greet his master?' Rather, it refers to an actual blessing, since it is customary for the old and the pious, when they appear before kings, to bless them with wealth and a glorious reign. Similarly we find [I Kings 1:31]: *Let my lord king David reign forever*. Upon departing, Jacob blessed him again [v. 10] in order to take permission to leave.

The commentators respond to Ramban's criticism by emphasizing that Rashi does not suggest that Jacob greeted Pharaoh the way one would greet his comrade, but the way one greets royalty. That is why Rashi was careful to write 'as is customary with all who occasionally present themselves before kings' rather than 'before comrades' (Mizrachi; Gur Aryeh).

8. בְּכֹה יָמֵי שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי: — *How many years have you lived?* [lit. *How many are the days of the years of*

your life?]⁽¹⁾

The manner in which Pharaoh phrased the question reflects the very deep impression that Jacob made on him, for Pharaoh spoke of both *days* and *years*. Pharaoh understood that every single day in the life of a great man is important and productive — and Jacob was obviously a very great man (R' Hirsch).

What prompted Pharaoh to ask Jacob this question is discussed by Ramban in v. 9 below.⁽¹⁾

9. In his reply Jacob draws a distinction. 'You ask about the days of the years of my life. My life has not been significant; I have sojourned on earth 130 years' (R' Hirsch).

— יָמֵי שְׁנֵי מְגֹרֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה — *The years* [lit. *the days of the years*] *of my sojourns have been a hundred and thirty years.*⁽²⁾

The days that I have lived as a *stranger, alien* have totalled 130 years, for I have been a stranger in other people's lands all my life (Rashi).

As R' Bachya notes, Jacob did not

1. The *Midrash* records that Og, who was Pharaoh's friend, was present when Jacob was presented to Pharaoh. [According to tradition, Og was Abraham's contemporary and enjoyed exceptional longevity. He fell in battle against the Israelites in the last days of Moses' life.] Pharaoh turned to Og and said, 'Had you not once told me that Abraham was a sterile mule who could not bear offspring? Yet, here is his grandson with 70 other descendants!'

'It is impossible!' Og answered. 'This man is very old; it must be Abraham himself.'

It was then that Pharaoh asked Jacob his age and his reply established that he was indeed Jacob.

Og tried to cast an Evil Eye upon them, but the Holy One Blessed is He, rebuked him and informed him that for having this desire, Og would one day be slain by a descendant of Jacob.

2. From the chronological detail of Jacob's age at this juncture the Sages in *Megillah* 17a deduce that Jacob had spent fourteen years in the Academy of Eber before proceeding to

47 * Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many years have you
8-9 lived?" * Jacob answered Pharaoh, "The years of my
 sojourns have been a hundred and thirty years. Few
 and bad have been the years of my life, and they have
 not attained the lifespans of my forefathers in the days

echo Pharaoh and say 'the years of my life' but 'the years of my sojourns,' that is, the days that I was a stranger on this earthly world were 130 years. Such is the way of the righteous who regard themselves merely as transient strangers in this world.

מָעַט וְרָעִים הָיוּ יָמֵי שָׁנֵי חַיִּי — Few and bad have been the years [lit. days of the years] of my life.

The times that I can really call my life, the days when I really accomplished all that I should have, were few and they were רָעִים, bitter and full of anxiety. I had to carry out my life's mission in unhappiness (R' Hirsch).

Even the few 'happy' years I experienced were marred by evil and misfortune (Abarbanel; Malbim).

As Sforno observes, years of suffering are not termed years of living. Therefore Jacob emphasized that the days of the years of his sojourns totaled a hundred-thirty.

Thus, most commentators perceive few in the qualitative sense to intimate the years Jacob truly lived, rather than existed.

Radak takes it in the quantitative sense referring to the total number of years of Jacob's life, and asks: How

Laban. See 'Chronological Deductions' on p. 1173.

Briefly, according to the relevant data, Jacob should have been 116 years old at this point. (Jacob was 63 years old when he received the blessings and fled + 14 years spent with Laban until Joseph was born + 30 years, Joseph's age when he became ruler of Egypt + 7 years of abundance + 2 years of famine=116) yet Jacob, by his own admission, was now 130 years!

— The 14 year discrepancy was those unrecorded years that Jacob spent in the Academy of Eber after leaving his father en route to Laban.

Accordingly, although it emerges that Jacob was away from his father a total of thirty-six years (14 years of study and 22 years with Laban), the fourteen years of Torah study were meritorious, and Jacob was punished only for the 22 years with Laban. His punishment was the absence of Joseph for a similar period of twenty-two years.

could he call his years few; did he then know how long he would live? — Rather, because of all he suffered he felt feeble and knew he could not expect to live too much longer. [He lived to the age of 147.]

What prompted Pharaoh to ask Jacob his age, and why was Jacob's response a complaining one?

Jacob had white hair and appeared very old to Pharaoh. Pharaoh therefore asked Jacob's age implying that he had never seen so old-looking a man in his entire kingdom.

Then Jacob answered that he was 130 years old — which was young in comparison with the ages his ancestors had attained — but he aged prematurely because he had experienced much trouble and vicissitude during his life. Thus, he did not mean to complain but to explain his premature aging (Rashbam; Ramban).

[However, see another view in the footnote on next page that Jacob was reprimanded for complaining to Pharaoh.]

וְלֹא הִשְׁיגוּ אֶת־יָמֵי שָׁנֵי חַיִּי אֲבֹתֵי בִימֵי — And they have not attained the lifespans [lit. the days of

ויגש
מז/יא-יג יא
שביעי
יב
יג
יֵצֵא אֶת־פָּרְעָה וַיֵּצֵא מִלִּפְנֵי פָּרְעָה:
וַיִּוְשֶׁב יוֹסֵף אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אֶחָיו וַיָּתֵן
לָהֶם אַחֲזָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּמִיטֵב הָאֶרֶץ
בְּאֶרֶץ רַעְמֶסֶס כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה פָּרְעָה:
וַיְבַלְכֵל יוֹסֵף אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אֶחָיו וְאֶת
כָּל־בֵּית אָבִיו לֶחֶם לִפְנֵי הָטָף: וּלְחֶם אֵין

the years of the lives] of my forefathers in the days of their sojourns.^[1]

How could Jacob have said this? He could still equal their longevity and might even outlive them! Rather, Jacob was intimating, as noted above, that regardless of how old he appeared, he still had not reached their lifespans [Abraham had lived to 175; Isaac to 180]; his suffering aged him prematurely (Ramban; see above).

Most commentators, however, perceive the *qualitative* rather than *quantitative* implication of this statement:

And they have not attained — in happiness (Rashi).

— My life is not comparable to the lives of my fathers. They lived *more* in the sense that every day of their existence was *living*, and they were able to carry out their missions under cheerful conditions. Jacob was modestly assessing the qualitative paucity of his life (R' Hirsch).

Although my forefathers, too, were strangers in foreign lands,

they nevertheless enjoyed many years of trouble-free living, even in exile, but my years as a stranger were not comparably free of travail.

וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב אֶת פָּרְעָה וַיֵּצֵא מִלִּפְנֵי פָּרְעָה — Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and left Pharaoh's presence.

Jacob blessed him and asked permission to depart, as is the custom of all who take their leave of high officials (Rashi; Ramban similarly).

[Comp. 1 Kings 8:66: On the eighth day he [Solomon] sent the people away; they blessed the king and went to their tents, etc.]

Rashi continues, citing Tanchuma Naso: What was the blessing with which he blessed him? — That the Nile should rise at his approach [lit. at his feet] — the overflowing Nile being the symbol of Egypt's fertility, for Egypt is not irrigated by rain, but by the Nile. [It was because the Nile did not overflow and irrigate the land for two years that there was a famine in Egypt (Maskil l'David).] Jacob's blessing was fulfilled, and from that moment

1. Jacob is punished for his complaint.

The Sages maintain that the Holy One Blessed is He is much more exacting when judging the righteous and demands a scrupulous accounting for their actions. Accordingly, Jacob was held to account for bemoaning his lot to Pharaoh.

Thus, when Jacob complained how 'few and bad' his days were, God upbraided him and said, 'I saved you from Esau and Laban, and returned Dinah and Joseph to you, yet you complain about My Ways!'

'By your life! Your years will indeed not number those of your forefathers, just as you have said. Your father Isaac lived 180 years; 33 years will be deducted from your years corresponding to the 33 words in those two verses' (Daas Zekeinim; Midrash; Chizkuni).

[Another reason for Jacob's "premature" death is offered in v. 28 below.]

47 of their sojourns." ¹⁰ Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and 11-12 left Pharaoh's presence.

¹¹ So Joseph settled his father and his brothers and he gave them a possession in the land of Egypt in the best part of the land, in the region of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. ¹² Joseph sustained his father and his brothers and all of his father's household with food according to the children.

whenever Pharaoh approached the Nile it overflowed and irrigated the land [as it used to before the onset of the famine (*Maskil l'David*).]

[Thus, as a result of Jacob's blessing, the famine came to an end after only two years, instead of the seven years foretold by Joseph. (See comm. to v. 18 below).]

11. Joseph settles his family in Rameses.

וַיַּתֵּן לָהֶם אֶחָזָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם — [And] he gave them a possession in the land of Egypt.

He settled them as full-fledged citizens, providing them with houses, fields, vineyards, and permanent property (*Ramban*).

בְּמִיטֵב הָאֶרֶץ בְּאֶרֶץ רַעַמְסֵס — In the best part of the land, in the region of Rameses.

Rameses was part of Goshen (*Rashi*).

[This city, according to some, is the same as רַעַמְסֵס, *Raameses* mentioned in *Exodus* 1:11. (Note the vocalization under the *y*; in our verse, it is *y*, whereas in *Exodus* it is *y*.) It was first named later, during the reign of Rameses II, who is considered by some to have been the Pharaoh of the oppression, but the Torah uses that name now for the sake of clarity. Others such as *Ibn Ezra* maintain that inasmuch as Rameses here is vowelized differently from the city in *Exodus* it is not to be identified with it. See comm. to *Exod.* 1:22.

Targum Yonasan identifies both names with Pelusium, a city at the extreme northeast of the Nile delta.]

בְּאֶשֶׁר צִוָּה פַּרְעֹה — As Pharaoh had commanded.

— In v. 6 above (*Ramban*).

Akeidas Yitzchak observes that the Torah purposely mentions this to emphasize that the settling of Joseph's family as full-fledged property-holders, was specifically by royal command. Therefore, their subsequent oppression and enslavement was criminal, since a royal decree conferring rights cannot be annulled.

12. לֶחֶם לְפִי הָסֵף — Food [lit. bread] according to the children.

That is, according to the individual needs of all the members of their households (*Rashi*).

I.e., in sufficient quantity for their needs. The phrase 'according to the children' is employed because children scatter and waste; thus the passage implies that Joseph supplied them with enough bread even to compensate for the wastefulness of their little ones. *Rashi* capsulizes this thought in his comment by referring to the 'needs of all the members of their households' (*Mizrachi*).

Sforno maintains, however, that the implication of our passage is that although Joseph could have provided them with an abundant amount of rations, this verse em-

בְּכֹל-הָאָרֶץ כִּי-כָבֵד הָרָעַב מְאֹד וַתֵּלֶה
אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן מִפְּנֵי הָרָעַב:
י וַיִּלְקֹט יוֹסֵף אֶת-כָּל-הַפֶּסֶף הַנִּמְצָא
בְּאֶרֶץ-מִצְרַיִם וּבְאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בְּשָׂבֵר
אֲשֶׁר-הֵם שָׂבְרִים וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת-הַפֶּסֶף

phasizes that he gave them only the amount required for their minimum needs, since it would have been insensitive to act otherwise when the rest of the land was suffering famine. Cf. *Taanis* 11a: "When the community is in trouble let not a man say, 'I will go to my house and I will eat and drink and all will be well with me.'"

According to various interpretations advanced by *Ramban* in his *comm.* to v. 18 below, this passage is describing either how Joseph sustained his family during the remainder of the famine, or more generally throughout all the following years of his life — even after Jacob's death, as indicated in 50:21 below.

13. Joseph's agrarian policy.

According to *Rashi*, the following narrative occurred before Jacob arrived in Egypt. The Torah now resume its narrative of the beginning of the famine.

[As emphasized often, the Torah is not a history book and it need not necessarily describe events in the chronological order of their occurrence. The following verses are a case in point. Following the Midrashic chronology, the famine ended when Jacob blessed Pharaoh (v. 10; see v. 19 below). Since it is clear that Jacob arrived in the second year of the famine, the following account which, as is evident from v. 18, spans two years, must have preceded his arrival, and hap-

pened in the first year of the famine. Sequentially, therefore, it follows chapter 41, and parallels the events in chapter 42.]

Ibn Ezra and *Ramban* view the chronology differently, and their opinions will be cited in the commentary below.

וְלֹחֶם אֵין בְּכֹל-הָאָרֶץ כִּי-כָבֵד הָרָעַב מְאֹד
— Now there was no bread in all the earth for the famine was very severe.

[Whether the term הָאָרֶץ means earth or land is discussed above in 41:57. It refers either to the three countries adjacent to Egypt, as *Ramban* following the *Midrash* interprets it, or, according to the Talmud, *Pesachim* 119a, the reference is to the whole world.]

The reference here is to the market places and private homes, which lacked bread; there was an abundance of grain, however, in Pharaoh's royal granaries which had been stored away by Joseph during the preceding seven years of abundance (*R' Shmuel ben Chofni*).

וַתֵּלֶה אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן מִפְּנֵי הָרָעַב—
And the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan became weary from the hunger.

Egypt and Canaan are mentioned because they are central to the narrative (*Ramban*).

The translation *became weary* follows *Rashi* who explains that this is the meaning of the term תֵּלֶה which is synonymous with וַתֵּלֶה [although both are from different roots: לָהַ and לָאָה respectively]; this is as *Onkelos* renders it. Related to this word is

47 ¹³ Now there was no bread in all the earth for the
13-15 famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the
land of Canaan became weary from hunger. ¹⁴ Joseph
gathered all the money that was to be found in the land
of Egypt and in the land of Canaan through the provi-
sions which they were purchasing, and Joseph brought
the money into Pharaoh's palace. ¹⁵ And when the

Proverbs 26:18: כְּמַתְלֵהָ הַיּוֹרֵד וְקוֹם (which Rashi renders: like a fatigued person who throws firebrands).

[Radak and R' Saadiah render similarly. See also *comm.* to יָאֵז, and they became wearied, above 19:11.]

According to Menachem ben Seruk, this word, as well as the word in *Proverbs*, signifies *madness*, and our passage depicts how the Egyptians became insane from the deprivation caused by the famine.

Historical descriptions of similar famines in Egypt give an idea of the frightening suffering from which Joseph spared the country. A witness to a Middle Eastern famine wrote, 'The consumption of human flesh became so commonplace that it no longer astonished anyone. The route from Syria to Egypt resembled a vast field strewn with corpses' (R' Munk).

14. וַיִּלְקֹט יוֹסֵף ... וּבְאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — [And] Joseph gathered all the money that was to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan.

But the inhabitants of other more distant lands did not come to Egypt, either because the distance was too great or perhaps the famine was not so severe there (*Rashbam*).

Since only a little money was left by then, the appropriate verb is לָקַט, which denotes gleaning in small quantities (*HaRechasim leBik'ah*).

1. As noted in the footnote on p. 1816, the Providential Master Plan called for Egypt to amass all this wealth. This constituted the foretold 'great wealth' [15:14] which the Israelites would take along — more than two centuries later — when they left Egypt. Thanks to these riches, R' Munk points out, the Tabernacle (מִשְׁכָּן) with its sumptuous interior, could be constructed in the middle of the desert.

בְּשֹׁכֵר אֲשֶׁרֵיהֶם שְׂבָרִים — Through the provisions which they were purchasing.

I.e., for which they were paying him money (*Rashi*). [*Rashi* is thus clarifying that שְׂבָרִים is a verb meaning *purchasing*; comp. 41:56.]

Actually, the farmers themselves had contributed the grain during the years of plenty when Joseph stored it in royal granaries [41:48-49]. Why, then, were they now forced to pay for it?

Ramban in 41:48 suggests two possibilities: Joseph bought the grain from them when market prices were low due to the abundance and sold it back when prices were high due to the famine. Or possibly Pharaoh had originally taken it from them by force and now charged them for it by claiming that the food was preserved only by his foresight, as otherwise it would have been squandered or become rotten.

וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף בֵּיתָה פַּרְעֹה — And Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's palace [i.e., treasury (*Targum Yonasan*)].

In a monarchy such as Egypt's, the king was synonymous with the State and the money was held by him personally (*Alshich*).

This is recorded to show how loyally Joseph served in his role. He faithfully gave all the proceeds to the king who trusted him, and did not exploit his position to enrich

טו בִּיתָהּ פָּרָעָה: וַיִּתֶּם הַכֶּסֶף מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
וּמֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל-מִצְרַיִם אֶל-יוֹסֵף
לֵאמֹר הִבֵּה-לָנוּ לֶחֶם וְלָמָּה נָמוּת נִגְדָּךְ
טז כִּי אָפֶס כֶּסֶף: וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף הֲבֹו מִקְנֵיכֶם
וְאַתָּנָה לָכֶם בְּמִקְנֵיכֶם אִם-אָפֶס כֶּסֶף:
יז וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת-מִקְנֵיהֶם אֶל-יוֹסֵף וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם
יוֹסֵף לֶחֶם בַּסּוּסִים וּבַמִּקְנָה הַצֹּאֵן
וּבַמִּקְנָה הַבֶּקָר וּבַחֲמֹרִים וַיְנַהֲלֵם בַּלֶּחֶם
יח בְּכָל-מִקְנֵיהֶם בַּשָּׁנָה הַהִוא: וַתֵּתֶם הַשָּׁנָה

himself by secretly hoarding money for himself by sending it to Canaan. As the narrative teaches us, Joseph even purchased all the farm land of Egypt for the monarch, and even the bodies of the Egyptians. Through his efforts, he was esteemed even by the populace "for it is God Who causes those who fear Him to prosper" (Ramban).

15. וַיִּתֶּם הַכֶּסֶף מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּמֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן — *And when the money was exhausted from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan.*

All the money was not used up at the same time. The poor obviously used up their money before the rich. Our passage accordingly speaks of the time when even the money of the rich was depleted (Tur).

According to the Midrash, however, Joseph was endowed with a prophetic spirit whereby he knew how much money each applicant had. He charged the rich high prices, and the poor low prices. The result was that both the rich and poor ran out of money at the same time.

The Torah specifically adds that the money was also used up in Canaan, because this was the basis of the Egyptians' argument to Joseph

in the following verses. When they came to Joseph they argued that since there was no more money left even in Canaan, there was no purpose in hoarding the grain since no other buyers could possibly apply for it. Therefore, *'why should we die in your presence?'* The money has been used up, and by withholding the grain you will cause our death in vain, inasmuch as the food will remain in your hands and no one else has the means to buy it' (Ramban).

— וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל-מִצְרַיִם אֶל-יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר *All the Egyptians [lit. and all of Egypt] came to Joseph saying,*

הִבֵּה-לָנוּ לֶחֶם וְלָמָּה נָמוּת נִגְדָּךְ — *Give us bread; [and] why should we die in your presence.*

Give us bread — do not insist on selling it. Why should you be the cause of our dying right in your presence? What benefit would the country have if we die and the food remains! (Alshich).

כִּי אָפֶס כֶּסֶף — *For the money is gone.*

— And if you do not make food available it will remain in your possession unsold, since no one has the money to buy it (Ramban).

47 money was exhausted from the land of Egypt and from
 16-17 the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph
 saying "Give us bread; why should we die in your
 presence? — for the money is gone!" ¹⁶ And Joseph
 said, "Bring your livestock and I will provide for you
 in return for your livestock if the money is gone." ¹⁷ So
 they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave
 them bread in return for the horses, for the flocks of
 sheep, for the herds of cattle, and for the donkeys; thus
 he provided them with bread for all their livestock dur-
 ing that year.

[The implication is: Why should we be forced to die of starvation just because we have used up all of our money; we have possessions which we can barter!]

16. Joseph's proposal to barter livestock for food.

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף לָהֶם בְּמִקְנֵיכֶם אֶמְצֵא כֶּסֶף ...
 — Bring your livestock, and I will provide for you in return for your livestock if the money is gone.

[This was all part of Joseph's master plan — to impoverish the Egyptians, and make them totally dependent upon the king. His argument was: To give you bread is not within my power. However, if it is indeed as you say that the money is used up, then bring me your cattle and I will barter them for food. If you still have livestock you have no right to ask for charity.]

Joseph used the expression, 'If the money is gone,' because he doubted it and therefore asked for their cattle; a man will give up his money sooner than his livestock (Haamek Davar).

The translation of מִקְנָה as livestock follows the familiar understanding of the term. Literally, it means possessions [from קָנָה, possess or acquire] in general, but it is usually applied to livestock and real property, and

in certain contexts, to domestic animals (Ralbag; Haamek Davar).

17. וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם יוֹסֵף לֶחֶם בְּסוּסֵיהֶם וכו' —
 And Joseph gave them bread [in return] for the horses, [and] for the flocks of sheep, [and] for the herds of cattle, and for the donkeys.

Joseph took horses first since they were the most valuable animals; Egypt was renowned for its horses (R' Hirsch).

וַיִּנְהֹלֵם בָּלֶחֶם בְּכָל־מִקְנֵהָם כַּשָּׁנָה הָהוּא
 — Thus he provided [lit. led] them with bread [in exchange] for all their livestock during that year.

He provided, literally he led them little by little. He gave them just enough to sustain them, as is right in time of famine. As the Sages say [Taanis 11a]: 'He who starves himself in years of famine escapes unnatural death.' Furthermore, as physicians note, excessive indulgence after a period of hunger leads to fatal consequences (Sforno).

בַּשָּׁנָה הָהוּא — During that year.

— Following Rashi and the Midrash [according to whom this narrative reverts to the beginning of the famine (see prefatory comm. to v. 13)], the reference is to the first year of the famine.

הָהוּא וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵלָיו בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִית וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ לֹא-נִבְחַד מֵאֲדָנִי כִּי אִם-תָּתֵם הַכֶּסֶף

ויגש
מזה

According to *Sforno* [essentially following *Ramban* and others — see below — the narrative is sequentially in order, and] the reference is to the sixth year of the famine.

[The above views are discussed in the following verse.]

18. Joseph sustains the Egyptians in exchange for their land.

בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִית — *In the next* [lit. *second*] year.

The second year of the famine [see prefatory comm. to v. 13].

§ The end of the famine

Although Joseph had said to his brothers [45:6]: *There will yet be five years when there will be no plowing or sowing*, as soon as Jacob came to Egypt a blessing came with him; they began to sow, and the famine came to an end [see v. 10 above]. This is derived from *Tosefta Sotah* 10:9. [This reference to the second year refers to the second year of the famine, which coincided with the arrival of Jacob, who came to Egypt in the famine's second year (above 45:6). Since the famine had ended as a result of Jacob's blessing, the populace begged Joseph for seed with which to sow the land again (v. 19).] (*Rashi* here and to v. 19 s.v. וַתֵּן יָדָע, Cf. *Bereishit Rabbah* 89:9).

Ramban elaborates on the interpretation that the famine ended after only two years. He explains that this pre-

mature ending of the famine did not cause people to doubt the wisdom or veracity of Joseph who had interpreted Pharaoh's dream as an omen of seven years of famine. Possibly the famine continued in Canaan for the full seven years, but in Egypt, Jacob went down to the Nile in the presence of Pharaoh and all the Egyptians and everyone saw the Nile rise as soon as he approached it. They all attributed the premature ending of the famine to Jacob's blessing and merit, not as an adverse reflection on Joseph's wisdom.

However, another difficulty remains. If the famine lasted only two years, it emerges that Pharaoh's dream was not true since it only revealed the seven-year decree to him, but not what would actually happen during those years!

To this, *Ramban* cites the continuation of the *Tosefta* in *Sotah* [mentioned in part by *Rashi*] that as soon as Jacob died the famine resumed. Similarly we find in *Sifre Eikev* #38 that in the view of R' Yosef, Jacob's blessing to Pharaoh was that the famine should cease — which indeed happened — and it resumed after Jacob died [to complete the last five of the pre-ordained seven years]. This was why it was necessary for Joseph to assure his brothers again after his father's death that he would sustain them (50:21). Since the famine had resumed, Joseph used the term *sustenance* in the sense that he used it in 45:11: providing nourishment in times of famine.^[1] Thus, the remaining five years were completed. [See 50:21.]

Ibn Ezra mentions the Midrashic interpretation that the famine ended in the

1. The *Sifre* continues its discussion of R' Yosef's statement that as soon as Jacob died the famine — which had ceased — resumed again for five more years.

R' Shimon says: It is not a sanctification of God's Name for the words of the righteous to be effective only as long as they lived and then be removed after their death. [Accordingly, Jacob's blessing of plenty should have survived him, and the famine should not have resumed after his death.]

R' Eleazar the son of R' Shimon said: I accept the opinion of R' Yosef rather than that of my father, for it is indeed a sanctification of God's Name for there to be a blessing in the world for as long as the righteous are alive, and for the blessing to be removed from it upon their departure!

47 ¹⁸ And when that year ended, they came to him in
 18 the next year and said to him, "We will not withhold
 from my lord that with the money and flocks of cattle

merit of Jacob. However, in line with the literal implication of the narrative he suggests that the two years of barter recounted in these verses occurred *after* Jacob's arrival. Since Jacob arrived after two years of the famine, a total of four years are now accounted for, leaving three more years of famine. As evidenced by the fact that the Egyptians requested seed for sowing — something they would not have requested had the famine still been raging in full strength — we can assume that the last three years of the total of seven, were not as severe as the first four. Presumably, there was *some* vegetation as a result of their sowing during the following three years.

Ramban dismisses this interpretation inasmuch as Pharaoh's dream gave no hint of different degrees in the severity of the famine; had there been such a difference, the Torah would have mentioned it.

Ramban concludes by discussing the literal sense [*p'shat*] of the narrative [i.e., the meaning indicated by the words of the Text itself — which does not specify that the famine ended after its second year]. Verse 14, which describes Joseph's collecting all the money in the region, refers to a period spanning the first five years of the famine, for how is it possible for all the money and cattle to have been exhausted in one year? Rather, their money lasted for five years and since nothing exceptional occurred during this period, the Torah treats it in one sweep by summarily relating how Joseph gathered up the money and brought it to Pharaoh. [It was, of course, during this period — in the second year of the famine as indicated in 45:6 — that Jacob came to Egypt.] Verses 15-17 refer to the *sixth* year of the famine when Joseph bartered food for cattle. Accordingly, the reference in our verse to *שְׁנֵי הַשָּׁנִים*; the 'second' year, refers to the year following the

sixth year — the year under discussion — that is, the seventh year, when the Egyptians begged Joseph to buy their bodies and land in exchange for feeding them during that seventh year. Because the land would belong to Pharaoh, they argued, Joseph should give them seed so the land would not be desolate, for they knew that the seven years of famine were about to end and they would again plant and reap.

[Maasei Hashem disagrees with Ramban's argument that the money would not have been depleted in only one year, but would have lasted five years. He observes that most small farmers are poor and would not have had the resources to last beyond that one year.]

Chizkuni also interprets that the events are sequentially related and the chronology is as follows:

Year 1 and 2: Beginning of Famine;

End of year 2: Jacob arrives;

Year 3: Joseph collects all the money [v. 14];

Year 4: Joseph sustains the Egyptians in exchange for their livestock [v. 17];

Year 5: Joseph sustains them in exchange for their land [vs. 18-20];

Year 6: Joseph sustains them in exchange for their bodies [v. 25];

Year 7: Joseph provides them with seed for sowing. The famine then ended and they reaped a harvest for the first time since the famine began. (Comp. Radak; Abarbanel; Malbim).

Sforno, as noted, similarly interprets that the 'second year' mentioned in this verse refers to the year following the one in which the money was depleted, that is, the seventh and final year of the famine.

לֹא יִנְחָר מֵאֲדָנִי כִּי אִם־הֵם הִקְשָׁף וּמָקְנָה
 לֹא יִנְחָר מֵאֲדָנִי — We will not withhold from my lord [i.e., our lord; the collective singular is used here], that with the money and flocks of cattle having been exhausted to my lord.

וּמִקְנֵה הַבְּהֵמָה אֶל־אֲדֹנִי לֹא נִשְׁאַר
לִפְנֵי אֲדֹנִי בְלָתִי אִם־גּוֹיֹתֵנוּ וְאֲדָמָתֵנוּ:
יט לָמָּה נָמוּת לְעֵינֶיךָ גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם־
אֲדָמָתֵנוּ קִנְיָה־אֹתָנוּ וְאֶת־אֲדָמָתֵנוּ
בְּלֶחֶם וְנִהְיָה אֲנַחְנוּ וְאֲדָמָתֵנוּ עֲבָדִים
לַפְרָעָה וְתוֹ־יָרַע וְנִחְיָה וְלֹא נָמוּת

The idiomatic implication of לא נבחר is: We would not dare withhold anything from you; there is simply nothing left to hide and the following proposal is made out of sincere desperation (*Akeidah*; *Chizkuni*; *Abarbanel*).

Rashi comments that the idiomatic expression כי אשר is synonymous with כי אם. [See *Rashi* to 24:33 where he similarly notes that אשר is synonymous with כי אם. See also footnote 18:15 where it is noted that in certain contexts the word כי is also synonymous with אשר. *Mizrachi* is uncomfortable with the fact that following this interpretation the word אשר is superfluous, and the phrase could just as well have read כי תם. Our translation that follows the comment of *Gur Aryeh* who implicitly renders the sense to be כי אשר (Cf. *Levush*). *Gur Aryeh*, *R' Shmuel ben Chofni* and *Ibn Janach* suggest that the thrust of most commentators is to emphasize that the use of אם in such contexts does not mean if but is idiomatic. See *Ribag* *Shoresh* אם; *Machberes Menachem* s.v. אם. Comp. also כי אם in 40:14 where the context causes *Rashi* to offer another interpretation of the phrase.

Alternatively, some interpret the phrase כי אם, following as it does the word לא, not, to mean but indeed. It implies: We would not insist that we used up our money if it were not true — but indeed the money and cattle had been consigned to my lord. Compare the similar usage above in 15:4; 32:27; 32:29. *Shaarei Aharon* suggests that since this interpretation in our context would require that too many words be elliptically added to our verse, *Rashi* preferred the translation he advanced.

However, *Sforno* perceives the meaning of אם more literally as if. He explains the passage as implying: We are

not withholding from my lord the fact that indeed we have more cattle, but even if it were true that everything was depleted it would be improper for you to let us die ...

The latter part of the phrase literally reads: ... there has been used up the money and the flocks of cattle to my lord. The passage is clearly elliptic. *Rashi* takes both the money and the flocks of cattle as the subjects of have been used up and explains the elliptic connotation of the passage to mean: 'The money and the flocks of cattle have been used up and everything has now come into my lord's hands.' [That the verb תם, used up, is in the singular — instead of the plural תמו — is no contradiction inasmuch as Hebrew verbs often employ the singular in the collective sense.] Our translation have been exhausted follows *Rashi's* exegesis.

Others divide the subjects and interpret: ... that the money has been used up, and the flocks of cattle have come into my lord's possession.

לא נשאר לפני אדני בלתי אם־גויֹתֵנוּ וְאֲדָמָתֵנוּ — Nothing is left before my lord but our bodies and our land.

I.e., nothing is left that we could offer our lord ... (*Sechel Tov*).

The expression בלתי אם [lit. except if] is idiomatic. The word בלתי sometimes means לא, not. בלתי אם therefore means לא אם which according to *Rashi* is an inversion of

47 having been exhausted to my lord, nothing is left
19 before my lord but our bodies and our land. ¹⁹ Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Acquire us and our land for bread; and we — with our land — will become serfs to Pharaoh; and provide seed so that we may live and not die, and the land will not

אם לא, if not. The meaning of the passage accordingly is: *nothing remains if not* [i.e., except for] *our bodies*. The commentators to Rashi note that the thrust of his commentary, here, as above [s.v. כִּי־אִם], is to negate mistranslating אם in its other sense of if.

לָמָּה נָמוּת לְעֵינֶיךָ גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם־לָא אֶרְמָנוּ — Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land?

What possible benefit could you gain from seeing us die? (*Sechel Tov*).

Do not wonder that the term *death* is used in connection with land; comp. the opposite connotation in *Nehemiah* 9:6: *and You give "life" to them all* [i.e. to the heavens, earth and seas mentioned in that verse] (*Ibn Ezra*).

Radak, B'chor Shor, R' Meyuchas and Ralbag similarly observe that land 'dies' when it is laid waste and neither plowed nor worked to yield produce.

קָנָה־אֶתְנוּ וְאֶת־אֶרְמָנוּ בְלָחֶם — Acquire us and our land [in exchange] for bread.

Then we will become your serfs, and you will be responsible to feed us in return for our labor (*Haamek Davar*).

Acquire us as serfs, and our land to become tax-yielding royal property (*Chizkuni*; *Ralbag*).

וְנִהְיָ אֲנַחְנוּ וְאֶרְמָנוּ עֲבָדִים לְפָרֶעָה — And we — with our land — will become serfs to Pharaoh [lit. let us

and our land become servants to Pharaoh].

Technically it is only the people ['we'] who will become 'servants' to Pharaoh; servitude does not apply to land, although in Talmudic usage we find the term שְׁעִבּוּר [subjection (in the sense of pledge or security)] applied to קרקע, land. The sense of the passage, then, as I interpret it is: *We will be slaves, and our land — possessions*. Comp. the Talmud's [*Sanhedrin* 44a] interpretation of *Joshua* 7:24 where the subjects in the verse are not treated as a group, but individually (*R' Shmuel b. Chofni*; see also *R' Saadia*).

Cf. *Sifra* to *Lev.* 10:14 and *Rashi* there. See also *R' Yishmael's* Hermeneutic rule No. 20 (printed in beginning of *Mossad Harav Kook* ed. of *Midrash HaGadol, Bereishis*). This concept is discussed fully in *Greenbaum's* note on this passage in his ed. of *R' Shmuel b. Chofni*.

וְתִזְרַע — [And] provide seed [grain].

With which to sow the land, for, as noted above, they had seen that the Nile again overflowed as a result of Jacob's blessing. If they could begin planting the famine would be over [see *Rashi* above].

According to *Ramban* and *Sforno*, this occurred in the seventh year when it was common knowledge that the famine would end, and they were acting in anticipation of this.

וְנִהְיָ וְלֹא נָמוּת — So that we may live and not die.

With the end of the famine at

כ וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִשָּׁם: וַיִּקֶן יוֹסֵף אֶת-כָּל-
אֲדָמַת מִצְרַיִם לְפָרֶעָה כִּי-מָכְרוּ מִצְרַיִם
אִישׁ שָׂדֵהוּ כִּי-יִחָזֶק עֲלֵהֶם הָרָעָב וְתָהִי
כא הָאָרֶץ לְפָרֶעָה: וְאֶת-הָעָם הָעֲבִיר אֹתוֹ
לְעֶבְרִים מִקְצֵה גְבוּל-מִצְרַיִם וְעַד-קֶצְהוּ:

hand, the seed would assure their survival since the following season would yield crops if they planted now.

Life in the sense of physical survival was the most they could now hope for; since their freedom had been forfeited they could no longer live a full, satisfaction-filled life. The implication then of the dual phraseology is: "That we may live in the sense of not dying," even though a life of servitude is not called *truly* living (*Haamek Davar*; *Shaarei Aharon*).

וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִשָּׁם – And the [farm] land will not become desolate.

[Through lack of cultivation.]

The Egyptians apparently were unaware of the full efficacy of Jacob's blessing and they were apprehensive that their 'land would become desolate.' The prophet Ezekiel paints a very bleak picture of what such desolation would mean for Egypt [29:8-12] (*R' Munk*).

The rendering *desolate* (= שָׁמָה) follows *Rashi* who cites *Onkelos'* rendering *לֹא תִבְנוּר*, shall not be uncultivated, the word *תִּבְנוּר* being related to the Mishnaic term *בִּנְר*, שָׂדֶה, an unploughed field.

Alternatively: that it not become desolate in the sense of losing its inhabi-

tants from starvation. Comp. *Ezekiel* 12:19 (*R' Shmuel b. Chofni*).

They thus vowed that if Joseph agreed to sustain them and provide them with seed, they would cultivate it and it would *never* become desolate (*Ramban*).

20. וַיִּקֶן יוֹסֵף אֶת-כָּל-אֲדָמַת מִצְרַיִם לְפָרֶעָה – Thus Joseph acquired all the [farm] land of Egypt for Pharaoh.

He acquired *all* the land, even courtyards, etc. that were not useful for farming (*Haamek Davar*).

Although in v. 19 they offered to sell *themselves* also as slaves to Pharaoh, we now find that Joseph bought only their *land*, stipulating in the following verses that they should work it forever as sharecroppers, and pay part of the produce to Pharaoh as rent (*Ramban*).

According to *Haamek Davar*, the reason Joseph did not make slaves of them was out of concern for the welfare of the State. He wanted them to remain self-sustaining and not become State wards. And as *Malbim* emphasizes, a ruler must always feel responsible for the sustenance of his subjects; and it would have been wrong for him to have bought them as slaves in return for bread.^[1]

1. *Meshech Chochmah* similarly observes that as a former slave Joseph could not tolerate the notion of one person enslaving another. Therefore, notwithstanding their offer, he did not buy them as slaves. He bought only their land, and engaged them as tenants – day workers, as it were – earning their bread. Therefore, Joseph says: [v. 23]: Behold I have bought you this day, and your land for Pharaoh; he meant, I have bought you this day – i.e. to work for me temporarily, as 'day workers', as it were, for the duration of the famine; and your land – per-

47 become desolate."

20-22 ²⁰ Thus Joseph acquired all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for every Egyptian sold his field because the famine had overwhelmed them. And the land became Pharaoh's. ²¹ As for the nation, he resettled it by cities, from one end of Egypt's borders to the other. ²² Only

בִּימְכָרוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת שָׂדֵהוּ כִּי חִזַּק עֲלֵיהֶם
הָרָעָב — For every Egyptian sold his field because the famine had overwhelmed them.

Every Egyptian executed a deed of sale for his land and presented it to Joseph (Midrash HaGadol).

וְנָתַתִּי הָאָרֶץ לְפָרֹעַ — And the land became Pharaoh's.

I.e., acquired by him (Rashi). Not only did he reign over the land — that was the case even before this arrangement — now the land was legally owned by him (Mizrachi).

21. וְאֶת-הָעָם הָעִבְרִי אָתָּה — And as for the nation, he resettled it by cities [i.e., from city to city].

That is, Joseph transferred the population from one city to the other to establish the monarchy's undisputed ownership of the land, and commemorate that individuals no longer had claim to any property they formerly owned. Joseph was concerned that each would cling tenaciously to his former property, and he wanted it absolutely apparent that anyone's association with a certain piece of State property was

at the king's pleasure exclusively (Rashi; Radak; Chizkuni; Meshech Chochmah).¹¹

Rashbam cites the parallel action of Sennacherib [portrayed in Isaiah 36:16f]. In both instances the purpose was to prevent the people from claiming ownership on the ground of possession.

R' Hirsch adds that even in carrying out this general evacuation, Joseph executed it wisely. He did not move about people haphazardly, for that would have broken down the social and community structure with harmful effects to the nation. Instead, Joseph arranged for the residents who had always lived together in a region to be moved *en masse* so that they found themselves still together with their friends in their new environment.

The translation of לְעָרִים as *by cities*, meaning *from city to city*, follows Rashi. [To express the idea of a transfer to the cities would have grammatically required the expression אֶל הָעָרִים (Akeidah).]

מִקְצֵה גְבוּל־מִצְרַיִם וְעַד־קִצְחוֹ — From one end of Egypt's borders to the other [lit. from the end of Egypt's border and until its end].

manently, for Pharaoh. Thus, the obligation upon the people was only temporary, while the acquisition of the land was permanent.

Similarly, it was to assure that they would not cling to their property that Joseph transferred from city to city [next verse], for since they remained free men, there was no other way to make it obvious that Pharaoh now owned their land.

1. Rashi notes further — citing Chullin 60b — that the Torah had no need to mention this except to suggest to us Joseph's lofty purpose in transposing them: He intended to prevent the Egyptians from jeering at his Jewish brothers because they were aliens. [That is, since the Egyptians themselves now became aliens in different parts of the country — none of them remaining as 'old inhabitants' on their own ancestral lands — they could henceforth not look down with disdain on Joseph's family as 'newcomers'.]

ויגש ב' רק אדמת הכהנים לא קנה כי חק
מז/כב-כד לכהנים מאת פרעה ואכלו את-חקם
אשר נתן להם פרעה על-פן לא מכרו
ב' את-אדמתם: ויאמר יוסף אל-העם הן
קניתי אתכם היום ואת-אדמתכם
לפרעה הא-לכם ורע וזרעתם את-
כ' האדמה: והיה בתבואת ונתתם
חמישית לפרעה וארבע הידת יהיה

I.e., Joseph carried out the above-mentioned policy of displacement in all the cities of the Egyptian kingdom from one end of Egypt's borders to the other (*Rashi*). [Not that Joseph caused individual people to be transferred from one end of Egypt to the other.]

22. רק אדמת הכהנים לא קנה — Only the land of the priests he did not buy.

[For the reason that the verse proceeds to tell us. Joseph's rationale for this display of reverence for idolatrous priests by granting them this dispensation is discussed in the *comm.* to the end of v. 26 below.]

The term *kohen* [priest] refers to one who ministers to a deity. There are exceptions to this, such as 47:22 above (*kohen* of On), and Exodus 2:16 (*kohen* of Midian) where the context denotes that the term refers to one of high rank

[— chief or governor] (*Rashi*; see *Ramban* to 47:22).

According to *Chizkuni* the term *kohen* in our verse, too, refers to the high officers. Joseph did not acquire their lands as he was afraid they might rebel.

Since the priests had a stipend from Pharaoh.⁽¹⁾

The translation of חק as stipend follows *Rashi* who explains the term — in this context — to mean "an assigned ration of bread daily." [This is apparently to avoid mis-translating חק in its other meaning of statute as below in v. 26.]

— על-פן לא מכרו את-אדמתם Therefore they did not sell their land.

I.e. therefore they did not have to sell their land for bread (*R' Saadiah Gaon*).

1. *R' Yehudah HaChassid* asked: Why is this detail recorded in the Torah?

— It was recorded so that the children of Israel should not be miserly in giving the *terumah* and tithes even though it would total a fifth [i.e. a negligible gift to the *Kohen*, a tenth to the Levite, and another tenth to be eaten in Jerusalem or, in the third and sixth years of the Seven-year cycle, to be given to the poor]. 'See what Pharaoh did on behalf of his idol-serving priests by not acquiring their land, and freeing them from paying him a fifth of their produce,' says God. 'But to you, My Children, I give Eretz Yisrael as an outright gift — surely you, who are children of the Living God, should give a fifth graciously' (*Moshav Zekeinim*).

Similarly, does the *Midrash* note: Pharaoh owned nothing of the world, yet he demanded a fifth of the crop [next verse] ... But the Holy One, Blessed is He, owns everything, and He demands that the children of Israel separate for Him only a [bit more than a] tenth for his servants the *Kohanim* and Levites.

47 the land of the priests he did not buy, since the priests
23-24 had a stipend from Pharaoh, and they lived off their
 stipend that Pharaoh had given them, therefore they
 did not sell their land.

²³ Joseph said to the people, "Look — I have acquired
 you this day with your land for Pharaoh; here is seed
 for you — sow the land. ²⁴ At the ingathering of the
 harvests you will give a fifth to Pharaoh; the [other]

**23. Joseph demands a fifth of all
 produce for the king.**

הן קניתי אתכם היום ואת אדמתכם
 לפירעה — Look — I have acquired
 you this day with your land, for
 Pharaoh.

I have bought you — not as you
 offered, to be slaves performing
 whatever tasks Pharaoh imposes
 upon you — but only in the sense
 that I have now acquired you along
 with the land. You must therefore
 remain on the land as permanent ten-
 nants to cultivate it. And I have the
 following lenient proposal to make
 to you [next verse] (Ramban).

[Meshech Chochmah in v. 20 dis-
 tinguishes between the 'acquisition'
 of the people themselves היום, only
 today — i.e. the obligation upon the
 people was only temporary, to work
 for their bread for the duration of
 the famine, but the land was dif-
 ferent — Pharaoh's acquisition of
 that was permanent.]

הא־לכם וזרעו וזרעו את האדמה
 Here is seed for you — [and] sow the
 land.

That they were to sow the land
 was their obligation to Pharaoh un-
 der the conditions of the agreement
 they had made in exchange for food
 (Ramban).

Therefore Joseph said, *Look I
 have acquired you this day with
 your land for Pharaoh. You are his
 serfs and obligated to work his land*

and he is obligated to supply you
 with food and seed for planting.
 Accordingly, the arrangement that
 all the harvests would belong to
 Pharaoh was quite legal, and they
 were required to sow the land
 (Sforno).

The word הנה is synonymous with
 הנה, here, behold. Compare Ezekiel
 16:43 (Rashi).

24. The following is the share-
 cropping arrangement as it would
 apply in the future when their
 planting — from Joseph's seed and
 on State property — would yield
 produce.

והיה בבתואות ונתתם חמישית לפירעה
 — [And] at the ingathering of the
 harvests [when the crops come up]
 you will give a fifth to Pharaoh.

Under our arrangement, it would
 have been proper for the king, who
 is now lord of the land, to take four
 fifths of the harvest and leave only
 the remaining fifth for you. How-
 ever, I will deal generously with
 you: You will take the portion due
 the owner of the land — four-fifths
 — and Pharaoh will receive only the
 portion due the tenant — one-fifth.
 The one restriction will be that you
 must remain to work the fields and
 cannot leave them (Ramban).

Some see in this a permanent ex-
 tension of the scheme which Joseph
 instituted during the years of plenty
 when [according to their interpreta-

וַיֹּשֶׁבֶט מִזֶּה כֹה־כֹו כֹה
 לָכֵם לְזֶרַע הַשָּׂדֶה וְלֹאכְלֵכֶם וְלֹאשֶׁר
 בְּבֵיתֵכֶם וְלֹאכֹל לְטַפְכֶם: °וַיֹּאמְרוּ
 הַחֵיתָנוּ נִמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנֵי וְהֵינּוּ
 עֲבָדִים לַפְרָעָה: וַיֵּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ יוֹסֵף לַחֶק
 עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה עַל־אֲדֹמַת מִצְרַיִם לַפְרָעָה
 לַחֲמֵשׁ רֶזֶן אֲדֹמַת הַכֹּהֲנִים לְבָדָם לֹא

tion of *חמש* in 41:34] Joseph collected a fifth of all the produce grown in Egypt to be stored for use during the famine.^[1] [Rashi does not subscribe to that view, interpreting *חמש* in that context to mean *prepare*. See *comm.* there.]

The translation of *בְּתוֹבוֹת* as *ingathering of the harvests*, rather than the more literal and common *at the harvest*, follows *Onkelos*. His reason for this deviation is that tithes are not customarily separated until after the crops are gathered, as recorded in *Berachos* 35. (*Marpei Lashon; Sechel Tov* renders similarly).

וְאַרְבַּע הָיְתָה וְהָיָה לָכֵם לְזֶרַע הַשָּׂדֶה
 וְלֹאכְלֵכֶם — *And the [other] four parts shall remain yours—as seed for the field and as food for yourselves.*

To be divided among the four categories enumerated later in the verse (*Chizkuni*).

As seed for the field — i.e., with which to plant in future years (*Rashi*). [He thus made it clear that in the future seed would not be provided them from Pharaoh's share, but from the generous four-fifths which Pharaoh allowed them.]

וְלֹאשֶׁר בְּבֵיתֵכֶם — [And] for those in your household.

I.e., the slaves and maidservants

1. Why did Joseph institute specifically this levy of a fifth?

There is an allusion here to the fact that everything was in Jacob's merit. Jacob had vowed to partake only of the four-fifths of whatever came into his possession, while the other fifth [=double tithe] was to be separated for sacred purposes (see *עֶשֶׂר אֲעָשֶׂה* in 28:22).

Accordingly, since the Egyptians now had food as a result of Jacob's blessing [for it was in

of your households (*Rashi*). [It cannot mean the *children* of the household since they are mentioned separately at the end of the verse (*Sifsei Chachamim*).]

Radak adds the livestock as well to this category.

וְלֹאכֹל לְטַפְכֶם — *And to feed [lit. and to eat for] your little ones.*

Your share of four-fifths will be adequate to satisfy all of these needs as the soil will be very fertile (*Radak*).

25. וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַחֵיתָנוּ — *And they said, 'You have saved our lives!' [lit. you have given us life].*

— By having provided us with food throughout the famine, and with seed for the future (*Sechel Tov*).

According to *Ramban* [v. 19]: You have given us life by generously allowing us to take four-fifths of the harvest.

The Rabbis in the Midrash perceive in the long form of this word *הַחֵיתָנוּ* (instead of *חֵיתָנוּ*) a homiletical extension implying gratitude not only for life in this world, but for life in the Hereafter as well. They were acknowledging their gratitude that Joseph had forced them to undergo circumcision (see *Rashi* to 41:55).

וְנִמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנֵי — *May we find favor in your eyes, my lord.*

47 four parts shall remain yours — as seed for the field,
25-26 food for yourselves and for those in your household,
 and to feed your little ones.”

²⁵ And they said, “You have saved our lives; may we find favor in your eyes, my lord, and we will be serfs to Pharaoh.”

²⁶ So Joseph imposed it as a statute till this day regarding the land of Egypt: it was Pharaoh's for the fifth; only the priests' land alone did not become Pharaoh's.

[I.e., may you continue to find us worthy.]

— To be treated as you have said (Rashi).

According to R' Meyuchas, the expression is idiomatic. It means: We are gratefully indebted to you.

והיינו עבדים לפרעה — And we will be serfs to Pharaoh.

— And will pay this tax annually (Rashi).

Rashi is emphasizing that the Egyptians did not repeat their earlier offer that they would be slaves to Pharaoh, as Joseph had already rejected that offer. Rather, they agreed to be serfs, in the sense of paying the annual tax Joseph was imposing (Mizrachi).

Ramban interprets: We will be serfs to Pharaoh as we have vowed, in the sense that we will work the land in accordance with his will.

26. וישם אתה יוסף לחק עד היום הזה — So Joseph imposed it as a statute till this day.

As a statute -- an irrevocable law (Rashi).

Till this day — until the days of Moses when the Torah was given. [That is, the statute mentioned in this verse was still in force in the

days of Moses.] Throughout Scripture until this day means until the time of the Scribe who recorded the matter (Rashbam to 19:37).

על־אדמת מצרים לפרעה לחמש — Regarding the [farm] land of Egypt: it was Pharaoh's for the fifth.

The phraseology לחמש לפרעה, literally to Pharaoh for the fifth, rather than חמש לפרעה, a fifth for Pharaoh, is significant. The land was Pharaoh's property to guarantee that he would receive payment of a fifth of the produce, for the State could take everything if a farmer failed to make his payment. This was meant to establish the principle that Pharaoh was not merely a one-fifth partner — as would be implied by לפרעה חמש — but that he was the complete owner, to guarantee the fifth (R' Hirsch).

רק אדמת הכהנים לבדם לא הייתה לפרעה — Only the priests' land alone did not become Pharaoh's.

Why did Joseph not oppose this special dispensation to the idolatrous clergy?

Tur explains that he remained grateful to Potiphara the priest of On whose daughter he had married,

his merit that the famine ended) Joseph imposed upon all the Egyptians a similar double tithe as their levy to the State (Kli Yakar).

כֹּה הָיְתָה לַפְּרָעָה: וַיָּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן וַיֵּאָחֲזוּ בָּהּ וַיַּפְּרוּ
וַיִּרְבוּ מְאֹד:

ויגש
מז/כו

and to the Egyptian priests who had spoken up in his defense against the accusations of his master's wife. They had saved him from being condemned to death as *Targum Yonasan* tells us in 39:20.

R' Yaakov Kaminetzky, שליט"א, explains that Joseph prophetically established a precedent that would later benefit Israel. By giving a privileged status to the clergy, Joseph made it possible for the tribe of Levi — who were the 'clerics' in Israel — to be exempt from the servitude to which the Egyptians later subjected the other tribes.

[See also footnote end of v. 22.]

27. According to *Rashbam* [v. 29] this verse would have been a natural place for the next *Sidrah* to have begun, but v. 26 did not provide a suitable ending for this *Sidrah*.

— וַיָּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן
Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt in the region of Goshen.

The region of Goshen explains where in the land of Egypt they dwelt (*Rashi*).

According to *Malbim*, they originally lived in Raamses [v. 11], but when Joseph resettled the Egyptians by cities [v. 21] he gave all of Goshen to the Israelites who were fruitful and needed a larger territory.

The Talmud [*Sanhedrin* 106a] records: 'The term וַיָּשֶׁב, settled, always foreshadows grief.' Thus in our verse, Israel settled in the land of Egypt ... is closely followed by the time approached for Israel to die [v. 29].

כֹּה — וַיֵּאָחֲזוּ בָּהּ
[And] they acquired property in it.

I.e., they purchased property in Goshen beyond what Joseph had given them (*Radak*; *Ibn Ezra*; *Chizkuni*).

This verse is a condemnation of the children of Israel. Notwithstanding God's decree to Abraham in ch. 15 that his descendants would be aliens in a foreign land, they

47 27 Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt in the
27 region of Goshen; they acquired property in it and
 they were fruitful and multiplied greatly.

sought to be settlers and property holders in a land not rightfully theirs (*Kli Yakar*).¹¹

וַיִּפְרוּ וַיִּרְבוּ מְאֹד — *And they were fruitful and [they] multiplied greatly.*

They were fruitful — in children; and *multiplied greatly* — in wealth, both because they were not required to give a fifth of their crops to Pharaoh, and because Heaven aided them (*Sechel Tov*).

[See *Ramban* to *Numbers* 3:14.]

Thus was fulfilled God's promise made to Jacob upon his departure to Egypt [46:3]: *For I shall establish*

you as a great nation there (*Chizkuni*).

According to the Masoretic note appearing at the end of the *Sidrah* there are 106 verses in *Vayigash* numerically corresponding to the mnemonic יהללא"ל, literally *praised be God*. This is a reference to the many praises due the Almighty for having spared Joseph and reunited the unblemished Patriarchal family. Furthermore, the Divine appellation אל designates, according to many opinions, the continuation of God's Aspect of Mercy with Strict Justice, and the mnemonic alludes to the praise due Him even for orchestrating the events that led to the Egyptian bondage. For just as the Jew is obligated to praise God for the goodness He bestows, so must we praise Him for that which appears evil.

The *Haftarah* begins with *Ezekiel* 37:15: וְאָתָה בְּדִאֲרָם עַל לֵךְ עַץ.

נשלם סדרה ויגש בעזרת האל

1. The phrase is literally in the passive: *And they were possessed by it*. According to the Midrash, the expression denotes how the land took possession of them, as it were, to make sure that they would fulfill their bond of servitude foretold to Abraham at the Covenant Between the Parts [15:13]. The land gripped them firmly, and had they desired to leave it they would not be free to leave it until the predetermined end of the bondage.

R' Hirsch, however, perceives in the nuances of our verse a contrast between Jacob and his family. While the Patriarch only settled in the land, his descendants let themselves 'be gripped' by the land. This attachment of the Israelites to the land of Egypt was attacked by the prophet *Ezekiel* (*Ezekiel* 20:67).

—

סדר ויחי

Sidrah Vayechi

— *The Overviews*

— — — — —

*An Overview/ In Egypt and for All Time**

אמר ר' סימון בשעה שבא הקב"ה לברא את
אדם הראשון ... אמת אומר, אל יברא שכלו
שקרים ... מה עשה הקב"ה? נטל אמת והשליכו
לארץ. הברא הוא דבתיב, ונתשלף אמת ארצה.

*Rabbi Simon said: At the time that the
Holy One, Blessed is He, came to create the
first man ... Truth said, 'He should not
create [man] because he is filled with
falsehoods' ... What did the Holy One,
Blessed is He, do? He took truth and threw
it to the earth. This is alluded to in the
verse (Daniel 8:12): He will throw truth to
the earth (Bereishis Rabbah 8:5).*

למה פרשה זו סתומה? לפי שבין שונפטר יעקב
אבינו נסתמו עיניהם ולבם של ישראל מצרת
השעבוד שהתחילו לשעבדם. דבר אחר שבקש
יעקב לגלות את הקץ לבניו ונסתם ממנו.

*Why is this sidrah closed [i.e., without the
space that customarily appears in a Torah
scroll to separate a new sidrah from the
previous one]? Because as soon as our
father Jacob died, the eyes and heart of
Israel were closed as a result of the oppres-
sion of the servitude, for they [Egyptians]
began to enslave them. Another reason:
because Jacob wished to reveal the
prescribed time for the end of all exiles],
but it was sealed from him (Rashi to
47:28).*

*The Overview is drawn primarily from the thought of Harav HaGaon Gedaliah Schorr, זצ"ל, much of which is recorded in *Ohr Gedaliahu*.

I. Jacob's Life in Egypt

Truth on Earth Jacob is epitomized by the attribute of 'Truth,' as the prophet says *תתן אמת ליעקב*, *grant truth to Jacob* (Micah 7:20). The man of truth takes all other values and traits and subjects them to the scrutiny of truth. Kindness is an exemplary characteristic, but there are times when kindness is destructive: generosity to thieves, murderers, and adulterers may well be a camouflaged form of cruelty that makes society its victim. Strictness can be a virtue, but there are times when it can inflict unnecessary harm. To give everything and everyone the proper regard and put them to their proper use is a sublime exercise of truth. It makes possible individual and societal behavior of the highest sort. By his judicious exercise of discriminating judgment, the man of truth blends extremes to create a symphony of the diverse voices of nature and people.

To give everything and everyone the proper regard and put them to their proper use is a sublime exercise of truth.

Small wonder that the literature of Kabbalah refers to the attribute of *אמת*, *truth*, as *תפארת*, *splendor*. When a course does justice to the potential of the individual, the demands of the environment, and the wishes of God, there is nothing truer and nothing more splendid. As the one who combined and found the proper balance between Abraham's attribute of *רחמים*, *kindness*, and Isaac's attribute of *גבורה*, *strength*, Jacob represents *אמת*, *truth*, and therefore, he is described by the Sages as the finest of the Patriarchs, the culmination of the Patriarchal ideal (see Overview to *Lech Lecha*, pp. 361-374).

Truth is one of the most fragile attributes, as modern man has proven.

Truth is one of the most fragile attributes, as modern man has proven to the distressed satisfaction of all but the most unobjective observer. We see falsehood handsomely dressed in the garb of truth in all areas — commercial, political, social, ethical, moral. Language has been turned on its head to laud monsters as angels — and vice versa. Small wonder

that the attribute of Truth argued that man should not be created because he would be saturated with falsehood. But, having decided that His plan required the creation of the universe despite its potential for major flaws, God flung Truth to the earth, so to speak, and created man.

The Best Years

Sfas Emes comments homiletically that God 'cast Truth down to earth in the sense that it *could* find a home in a man. Despite all the pressures and temptations of life, man is not compelled to surrender to falsehood.

As a symbol of truth, Jacob is the one whose life and legacy best illustrate that man need not succumb.

As the symbol of truth, Jacob is the one whose life and legacy best illustrate that man need not succumb. The Torah introduces our *sidrah* by telling us that Jacob — the very epitome of truth — *lived in Egypt*. The Torah uses the word 'life' advisedly; we are not told that Jacob settled [וַיָּשָׁב] or sojourned [וַיֵּגֶר], the customary Scriptural terms for habitation. Unlike English, idiomatic Scriptural Hebrew does not use נִיחָי — from חַיִּים, *life* — to refer to dwelling. If we are told that Jacob *lived* in Egypt, it can only mean to indicate that his life there was wholesome, spiritual, complete — that it was a true, meaningful life — according to the definition of the Patriarch.

Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu derives from the use of the expression נִיחָי, [Jacob] *lived*, that his seventeen years in Egypt were of the highest possible form of life: it was מַעֲיֵן עוֹלָם הָבָא, *a semblance of the World to Come*. *Baal HaTurim* notes that he lived there for seventeen years, the numerical equivalent of טוב, *good* [טוב=17], meaning that his years in Egypt epitomized the best in life.

Egypt was not only the world's leading power at the time, it was a hotbed of sorcery, idolatry, and immorality.

This seems shockingly incongruous. Egypt was not only the world's leading power at the time, it was a hotbed of sorcery, idolatry, and immorality, as both Scripture and the writings of the Sages make unmistakably clear. We are not surprised that a great man like Jacob could maintain his spiritual standing in Egypt — if Joseph could do it as a lonely, helpless lad, surely Jacob could do so as a mature man surrounded by his family and living in the relative isola-

tion of Goshen. But how can it be that Jacob's years in Egypt could be more akin to the sanctity of the World to Come than even his years in the Holy Land itself?

Straits and Egypt

It was he, let us remember, who had demonstrated that one must prepare himself for exile with particular care.

Jacob's years of spiritual exaltation in Egypt were the triumphant climax of his task of nation building. He had taught his children many things and ingrained many traits in the people of Israel. Our existence and survival is based on the foundation of the Patriarchs and the tradition extending from them, but the final touch was provided by Jacob in Egypt. It was he, let us remember, who had demonstrated that one must prepare himself for exile with particular care: after leaving the greatest people of the age, Isaac and Rebecca, with whom he had spent the first sixty-three years of his life, Jacob found himself unready to go to Laban until he had spent fourteen years studying the 'Torah of Exile' in the Academy of Shem and Eber [see Overview to *Vayigash*].

Now, in Egypt, he had another lesson to teach about exile. How does one keep from drifting or declining in Egypt? The Hebrew word for Egypt has the identical spelling as the word for 'straits' [מִצְרִים=מִצְרִים]; like all such phenomena in the Holy Tongue, the similarity is not coincidental. As the first national exile decreed by the Torah, Israel's Egyptian sojourn is symbolic of all the later exiles, and the tactics of survival practiced in Egypt are illustrative of those needed in the future. For exile consists primarily of the Jew finding his existence 'straitened' and under inhospitable pressure from his surroundings.

Exile consists primarily of the Jew finding his existence 'straitened' and under inhospitable pressure.

What are these 'straits'? They can take many forms: the 'new' moralities, business competition, the price of acceptance by the non-Jewish or non-observant world, the homogenizing effects of a free society, and so on. O yes, persecution and intolerance qualify fully as 'straits,' but history has shown, unfortunately, that freedom and prosperity can be even more damaging to Jewishness. By telling us that Jacob, the embodiment of Truth, experienced a flowering of life particularly in Egypt the Torah

tells us that a passion for truth as defined by Jacob is the key to flourishing survival in every human condition, no matter how straitened it may be. Truth for the Jew is Torah, for God created the universe in consonance with the dictates and precepts of the Torah. The Torah is our lifeline in Egypt and everywhere, in Jacob's final years and for all time.

II. Torah and Reality

Blueprint of Events

The *Zohar* teaches אֶסְתַּבֵּל בְּאוֹרֵיהָ וּבְרָא עֲלֶיהָ [God] looked into the Torah and created the universe. Every part of creation was made and exists because, in one way or another, it serves the needs outlined in the Torah. [This concept is explained in the Overview to *Bereishis*, pp. xxix-xxx.] Nothing is haphazard in creation; just as God imposes so-called natural laws governing the regular, unchanging functions of nature, so there is an order to so-called miracles, the more obvious manifestations of God's hand. But whether an event is natural or miraculous, it flows from the system contained in the 'blueprint' of creation — the Torah — which God translated into the flesh-and-blood, sticks-and-stones, mountain-and-valley world we live in.

Commentators note that there is a close relationship between the power the Torah gives qualified Sages to suspend temporarily certain laws (under carefully defined and strictly limited rules) and their power to work miracles, as R' Pinchas ben Yair and R' Chaninah ben Dosa did (*Chullin* 7a).

Given the fact that the Sages can 'amend the blueprint,' so to speak, by suspending a law, it stands to reason that they can suspend nature.

Given the fact that the Sages can 'amend the blueprint,' so to speak, by suspending a law, it stands to reason that they can suspend nature, which is but the translation of such laws into physical phenomena. For example, if Rosh Hashanah fell on the Sabbath, the Sages ordained that the shofar not be blown; if they had that power, why could they not have the power to split a river, as R' Pinchas did (*ibid.*), by temporarily suspending the law of nature

The commandments and narratives of the Torah are reflected in events as well as in law and observance.

that water must flow downstream? Clearly, the commandments and narratives, and even the allusions and implications of the Torah, are reflected in events as well as in law and observance.

There are chapters of redemption and chapters of exile, and these chapters, when applicable, control the events they foreshadow in the history of Israel. Our *sidrah* contains at least a suggestion of redemption. Before his death, Jacob wished to reveal to his children when the End of Time, the culmination of all suffering and exile, would come. He summoned his children to gather around him so that he could tell them *אֵת אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא אֲתֶכֶם בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים* — *what will befall you in the End of Days* (49:1). It is noteworthy that the verse uses the word *יִקְרָא*, from *קרא*, *call*, instead of the seemingly more appropriate *יִקְרָה*, from *קרה*, *happen*. [See *Daniel* 10:14 where on almost identical phrase *does* use *יִקְרָה*.] The Torah thereby stresses that the events of that longed-for time of fulfillment will not be mere ‘happenings,’ as if they were coincidental or caused by the impersonal and inexorable grinding of the wheels of history. Instead, those events will be in the nature of God *calling* [*יִקְרָא אֲתֶכֶם*, lit. *He will call you*] upon us to discard the physical and spiritual fetters of exile; calling us in love to come join Him, to become again the resting place of His Presence. In attempting to relate what the future would hold — information that God did not permit him to transmit — Jacob made it plain that Jews would not be the pawns of history, but that their ordeals and their deliverance would result from God’s attention and conscious concern. God will *call* us when the time comes — and then the exile will end.

In attempting to relate what the future would hold, Jacob made it plain that Jews would not be the pawns of history.

Function of Spaces In this light the Sages understand the unusual manner in which our *sidrah*, *Vayechi*, is printed in the Torah scroll. Always, the Torah leaves a space between one *sidrah* and the next. Usually a *sidrah* will begin on a new line, but never is there less than a blank space the width of nine normal letters. The only exception is *Vayechi*, which begins with no extra separation at all. The Sages recognized that this

phenomenon indicates an added dimension of the narrative.

The 'spaces' in the Torah have a function aside from the aesthetic purpose of indicating that a new subject is about to begin.

The 'spaces' in the Torah have a function aside from the aesthetic purpose of indicating that a new subject is about to begin. Every chapter and subject in the Torah contains an infinite degree of intellectual and spiritual illumination. The Midrash relates that whenever R' Yehudah the Prince [according to some versions, R' Yannai] went to Rome to intercede on behalf of his Jewish brethren, he would immerse himself in the narrative of Jacob's confrontation with Esau (*Genesis* ch. 32-33). Once R' Yehudah failed to study these chapters and his mission was a failure. The Sages perceived that narrative to be Jacob/Israel's guide in all its future dealings with a more powerful Esau/Edom/Rome (*Bereishis Rabbah* 78:15; *Ramban* 33:15). We would surely not see in those chapters what R' Yehudah saw, but to his perceptive eyes, they provided illumination in the most delicate negotiations and interventions. Similarly every verse of the Torah has its own teachings and unique degree of enlightenment — witness the many tomes of halachic and aggadic literature that elucidate seemingly obscure references in the Torah.

An open space in the Torah implies an 'openness' of meaning, a degree of accessibility to the student.

The Sages teach in *Toras Kohanim* that the separations between subjects in the Torah Scroll indicate that God paused at those spots to allow Moses an opportunity to reflect on what he had just been taught and absorb its full meaning. The implication is that an open space in the Torah implies an 'openness' of meaning, a degree of accessibility to the student who wishes to extract the meaning of the verses.

Whenever the Torah records prophetic songs that were ecstatically sung in gratitude for God's miraculous interventions on behalf of Israel — such as the Song at the Sea (*Exodus* 15:1-19) or the Song of Deborah (*Judges* 5:1-31) — there is a broad open space after every phrase. The use of such spaces alludes to the special nature of the experiences and events commemorated by such songs.

In our human terms, the difference between music

When people recognize the harmony in creation they have heard the song of the universe.

and noise is that music is 'the art of organizing sound so as to elicit an aesthetic response in a listener,' while noise is 'a sound or sounds, especially when unexpected or disagreeable.' When people recognize the harmony in creation — that all of its parts respond to the will of God, each in its own ordained way — they have 'heard the song of the universe.' [The concept of song is discussed at length in the Overview to *Song of Songs*.] It is not often that ordinary humans are privileged to perceive such harmony in the service of God; it is a rare degree of open revelation of God's controlling hand. It is as if God had opened a window and allowed us to see how the most dissimilar, even contradictory, forces mesh their efforts to carry out his will. The open spaces in Scriptural song symbolize this 'openness' of understanding. When such a phenomenon of harmonious people and nature stimulates man to his own voice to join the song of the universe, Scripture reflects man's insight into the workings of God by means of the wide spaces between the phrases of the prophetic song.

The shadows of servitude closed in upon them and Jacob was not permitted to tell them when the exiles would end.

Conversely, when Jacob's life ended, his offspring lost their capacity to perceive. What it was that they could not see will be discussed below, but as *Rashi* tells us, their eyes and heart were sealed with Jacob's death, as the shadows of servitude closed in upon them and Jacob was not permitted to tell them when the exiles would end. The Torah's text suggests this sense of unending, unrelieved gloom by omitting the customary space between the *sidros*. A space would imply understanding and illumination, but Jacob's family felt none.

III. Human Tabernacle

Book of Creation

As noted above, Jacob's seventeen years in Egypt brought him to a spiritual zenith. Nor was this greatness limited to him. By demonstrating to what a great extent someone could 'live,' if he allowed himself to be guided by the truth of Torah, Jacob

His was a life so saturated with holiness and meaning that it should have remained as a beacon for all time.

provided precedent and inspiration to every generation of Jews in whatever 'Egypt' they might find themselves. His was a life so saturated with holiness and meaning that it should have remained a beacon for all time. Indeed, the lives of the Patriarchs have a significance far beyond that of any other individual, no matter how great he might be.

Ramban (Introduction to *Exodus*) calls *Genesis* ספר היצירה, *the Book of Creation*, in two respects. Obviously it tells how the universe was created, but it is also the tale of another Creation:

ובמקרי האבות שהם בענין היצירה לנרצם מפני שכל מקריהם ציורי דברים לרמוז ולהודיע כל צחיד לבא להם

The experiences of the Patriarchs are like a creation to their children, because all their experiences are symbolic occurrences, alluding to and foretelling everything that would happen to them [i.e., the descendants of the Patriarchs] in the future.

As we have frequently seen throughout the Book of *Genesis*, the experiences of the Patriarchs are the signposts of Jewish history. Since God created the universe as a vehicle where Israel could accept and carry out the precepts of the Torah, the development of the Jewish nation is not merely a minor cog in creation. *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Bereishis* 1) teaches that God made a condition with the universe that it would remain in existence only if Israel agreed to accept the Torah. The creation of Israel, therefore, is as exalted and essential an act of creation as any of the acts described in the first chapter of *Genesis*. The entire book is the story of creation, because the lives of the Patriarchs, until Jacob's last breath, were portentous and cast shadows on eternity.

The creation of Israel is as exalted and essential an act of creation as any of the acts described in the first chapter of *Genesis*.

The True Redemption

The Book of *Exodus*, Ramban continues, is the book of the first exile and redemption, but those events do not end with the story of the exodus from Egypt, despite the fact that the physical exile ended when Israel crossed through the Sea of Reeds and left their former oppressors behind them forever:

הגלות איננו נשלם עד יום שובם אל מקומם ואל
מעלת אבותם ושובו ... ולכן נשלם הספר הזה
בהשלימו ענין המשכן ובהיות כבוד ה' מלא
אותו תמיד.

The exile was not completed until the day they returned to their place and were restored to the status of their forefathers ... Therefore this book ends with the conclusion of the subject of the Tabernacle and when 'the glory of HASHEM filled it' (Exodus 40:35) constantly.

The exile had begun when creation ended; redemption did not come until the nation succeeded in returning to the place and exalted status of its forefathers. Ramban's definition of redemption is truly electrifying. The exile had begun when creation ended; redemption did not come until the nation succeeded in returning to the place and exalted status of its forefathers. Ramban implies clearly that the tents of the Patriarchs were equivalent to the Tabernacle and Temple; all were the home of the Shechinah. Bereishis Rabbah (60:16) describes the similarity between the tent of Sarah and the Tabernacle. A cloud of holiness hung by the entrance of Sarah's tent, like the pillar of holiness that was suspended over the Tabernacle; her dough remained fresh and tasty so that guests could always satisfy their hunger, like the *לחם הפנים*, *show bread*, that was placed in the Tabernacle only once a week but was always fresh; her lamp would remain lit from Sabbath eve until Sabbath eve, like the *נר מערכי*, *western light* of the Temple, that stayed aflame until it was time to light the Menorah the next day.

As long as Jacob was alive, his descendants had a human Tabernacle in their midst; when he was gone they were plunged into an exile that would not end until they could erect a Tabernacle.

When Solomon erected the First Temple he prayed that God would heed the prayers and favor the sacrifices that would be offered there. Centuries later when Solomon erected the First Temple, he made a lavish and soulful dedication ceremony and prayed that God would heed the prayers and favor the sacrifices that would be offered there. God replied that he had heard and accepted Solomon's prayers, that the Temple would remain sacred forever, and that (*1 Kings 9:3*): *והיו עיני וְלִבִּי שָׁם בְּלִי חֵץ*, *My eyes and My heart will be there*

God promised Jacob that He would accompany Him to Egypt and the same promise applied to every Jewish exile.

for all time. God's 'eyes' symbolize His Providential concern for each Jew and His 'heart' symbolizes His love for all Jews. God sees His children and, each according to what he deserves, provides his needs and cares for him; and He loves them with a love that survives despite their apathy and sin. God promised Jacob that He would accompany him to Egypt and, the Sages derive, the same promise applied to every Jewish exile, even those caused by Jewish iniquity. 'Beloved is Israel; the *Shechinah* is with them. When they were exiled to Egypt the *Shechinah* was with them, when they were exiled to Babylon the *Shechinah* was with them' (*Megillah* 29a). God does not wait for Israel to repent; He shares their agony. There can be no greater expression of His love.

Sins of Eye and Heart

The eyes and heart are the two agents that bring man to transgress; the eye sees and the heart is tempted.

Jacob himself was equivalent to a Tabernacle; after the exodus, all his descendants contributed to the construction of a Tabernacle so that the nation as a whole stood in place of its Patriarch. But each individual Jew is a miniature sanctuary with the potential to serve as the chariot for at least some degree of God's Presence. The Talmud (*Berachos* 6a) teaches that God wears *tefillin*, as it were, to symbolize His dedication to Israel just as Israel's *tefillin* symbolizes its dedication to Him. God's eye is upon the Jew and His heart throbs for him, and it is incumbent upon the Jew to reciprocate by dedicating his own eyes to perceive Godliness and his heart to love God.

The eyes and heart are particularly susceptible to temptation. They are described as the two agents that bring man to transgress; the eye sees and the heart is tempted — then the body acts (*Yerushalmi Berachos* 1:5). The heart and eyes of Israel were sorely tested in Egypt. The Talmud (*Berachos* 12b) interprets the sin of the heart as idolatry, which comes when one discards his love of God and transfers it to some other being. In Egypt, sorcery had become a well-developed art: the art of denial that God is the ruling force of creation. The sin of the eye is immorality (*ibid.*), for people are drawn to beauty when they see it; man's imagination can lead him far enough astray,

*A land of sorcery
and immorality by
its very nature
wages war against
the special holiness
expected of Jewish
eyes and hearts.*

but his eyes are far more dangerous. Egypt was a licentious country as the bitter experiences of Sarah and Joseph demonstrate. A land of sorcery and immorality by its very nature wages war against the special holiness expected of Jewish eyes and hearts.

As long as Jacob was alive, the eyes and heart of God were directed toward the Patriarchal sanctuary in Egypt. The growing, thriving young Jewish nation drew its own spiritual sustenance from Jacob; he was a life-force for them, a moral buffer protecting them from the deleterious influences of Egypt. Throughout the long exile, Jews have groaned that their personal lives would be better if only they could see the Temple, if only they could be warmed and draw inspiration from the *Shechinah*. In Egypt it happened. Jacob was their Temple. God's eyes and heart were perceptibly directed at him and were reflected from him to his children.

IV. Exile Closes In

*Subtle
Servitude
Information
Imparted*

When Jacob died, the '*eyes and heart of Israel were closed.*' The Temple, the chariot of the *Shechinah*, was no longer present. God's scrutiny and love were no longer apparent though they were still there, just as they remain with Israel in the darkest, gloomiest depths of every exile.

But Israel could no longer see Him.

When Jacob was gone, Egypt's appeal to Jewish eyes and heart was incessant, enticing; it was a matter of the senses, while God's providence and love was a matter of faith.

This is not to say that Israel lost its faith in God as soon as Jacob died, certainly not for as long as the tribal ancestors were alive. The process of change is slow and subtle. One sees the Tabernacle, one remembers it well, then more faintly, finally it recedes to a corner of the mind. The process is not sudden at all and is often unnoticed by all but the most perceptive people. Someone once said of the Chofetz Chaim, 'You and I believe in the World to

*One sees the
Tabernacle, one
remembers it well,
then more faintly,
finally it recedes to
a corner of the
mind.*

*To him the World,
was as real as the
room next door,
while to us it is an
abstract concept.*

Come just as he did, but to him the World to Come was as real as the room next door, while to us it is an abstract concept, like our knowledge that there are salt mines in Siberia.' While Jacob was alive, his family 'saw' the Tabernacle, but when he died, the vision changed to an ever fainter memory.

The Sages say that Israel's 'eyes and heart were closed' because of the servitude. This seems strange because we know that Joseph served as viceroy until his own death, fifty-four years after Jacob's passing, surely there was no servitude then. Furthermore, the servitude did not begin until the death of Levi, the last surviving tribal ancestor (see *Rashi* to *Exodus* 6:16), who outlived Joseph by nearly twenty-five years. It seems incongruous, therefore, for the Midrash to speak of Egyptian subjugation at the death of Jacob, when it did not begin until nearly eighty years later. To understand this we must reorient our thinking. We are accustomed to describe an Egyptian experience as one of bricks, work quotas, back-breaking labor, murder of infants, whips, and tears. They were all present, of course, later on. But there are other forms of servitude.

On the simplest level, Jews began feeling like aliens after Jacob died. The citizens of Egypt may have begun showing resentment against the 'foreign interlopers' in subtle ways — the lack of a smile; the pointed remarks about the 'pushy Jews' who were too numerous, too successful, too well entrenched; the feeling that the Patriarch had been a holy man who brought an end to the famine, but that his son, the viceroy, had bled the people dry and robbed them of their land and funds before giving them a piece of bread. Poor people don't feel servitude until the lash stings their back; aristocrats feel it when their privileges are threatened.

*Poor people don't
feel servitude until
the lash stings
their back;
aristocrats feel it
when their
privileges are
threatened.*

On a deeper and truer level, the bondage of the Jewish soul began before that of the Jewish body. Israel's eye began losing its glow and its heart began beating to the wrong cadence long before Pisom and Ramesses were planned and the first brick baked. While they were still comfortably ensconced in

Goshen, prospering and multiplying, their spiritual selves realized that subjugation to the culture of Egypt was creeping up on them — their eyes and heart were closing.

Jacob wished to reveal the End to his children, but it was closed from him (see comm. to 47:28 and 49:1). The commentators inquire, if Jacob did not reveal the End, why was it necessary for the Torah to imply that he wished to do so? Surely there must be some reason for telling us of his frustrated intention.

The Torah would not have alluded to Jacob's attempt if it had been a total failure.

The Zohar emphasizes that the Torah would not have alluded to Jacob's attempt if it had been a total failure. Rather, 'He accomplished whatever he wished to reveal — he revealed it and then it was concealed.'

Let us try to understand the profound words of the Zohar.

What was to be gained by informing the tribal ancestors of the date when the exile would end? Simply understood, an exile is easier to bear if one knows when it will be over. A prisoner who can count down the days — or even years — to his release is fortunate compared to someone serving an indefinite sentence.

The End of Days is a concept; it refers to the condition that will prevail when the Messiah arrives.

Jacob's intention can be understood in a different, deeper sense. The expression *וְעַתָּה*, *End [of Days]*, has a meaning beyond the calendrical *date* when Moses or the Messiah will arrive. The End of Days is a concept; it refers to the condition that will prevail when the Messiah arrives. It expresses the ideal of human perfection and a world where everyone recognizes God's greatness, a world where nothing obscures the truth of His Presence. This is what Jacob wanted to reveal to his children. He wanted to teach them how they could live in alien surroundings, but not be part of them; how they could draw inward and live in a world of mind and heart that is bounded and informed by the Torah and God's Presence.

That, God would not permit him to do, because the Divine Plan called for a *true* exile; had Jacob carried out his intention the exile would have been only one of form, not substance.

Geographically, he
was in Goshen,
but spiritually he
was in Eretz
Yisrael on the
Temple Mount.

This may be strange to a twentieth century mind. To those who live in luxury, the 'spiritual life' can seem like something out of a fable, to those who endure true suffering, the exile is only too real. In one of Jacob's last 'acts of creation,' however, he implanted with the Jewish nation the capacity to build Tabernacles wherever they were, for that was the *personal* world in which he spent his last seventeen years. Geographically, he was in Goshen, but spiritually he was in *Eretz Yisrael* on the Temple Mount — for did he not embody the very Temple where God's eyes and heart are always directed? This, too, is part of Jacob's legacy — that someone who always perceives the *Shechinah* and God's guiding hand never suffers exile whether he is in an Egypt or a dungeon. In this sense, the commentators differentiate between *personal* redemption and *general* redemption. True, the entire nation of Israel lacks its Temple and suffers exile, but there are degrees in the exile as it is felt by *individuals* — some suffer from it more than others.

If one Jewish
community is in
physical danger,
another will be
secure; if one is
poor, another will
be growing
stronger.

In the physical sense we understand this most clearly, for Jewish suffering has always varied from community to community and generation to generation. *Ramban* derives this familiar historical phenomenon from the Torah itself. When Jacob prepared to wage war to save his family from Esau, he divided his people into two camps, saying that if Esau succeeded in striking one, the other group would be able to escape. This portends Jacob's plan of coping with the future exile of Esau/Rome. Never would *all* Jews be in danger of extermination, חלילה, at the same time. If one Jewish community is in physical danger, another will be secure; if one is poor, another will be growing stronger. Many times this has enabled a community to be a physical refuge or a source of support for its less fortunate brethren. Obviously, then, the distress of the exile is not distributed evenly. Nor do all the prophesied ravages of God's wrath come at once or in close succession. History demonstrates that so-called golden eras have been interspersed among the crusades, pogroms, ex-

pulsions, and discriminations, so that Israel could 'catch its breath' so to speak, develop new communities, strengthen its spiritual resources, and muster up the strength to survive.

There are variations as well in the levels of exile among individuals. Rare people are always in communion with God, recognizing even travails as part of His ultimately merciful purpose. A famous American journalist once insisted on seeing the Chofetz Chaim. Though an interview was out of the question, she managed to watch him through the window of his modest little home in Radun, Poland. Never a robust physical specimen, he was frail and in his nineties. She watched silently and as she left, she said reverently, 'I have seen the Jewish God.'

*She watched
silently and as she
left, she said
reverently, 'I have
seen the Jewish
God.'*

By twentieth century terms, the Chofetz Chaim's 'exile' was surely minimal compared to that of others, and his bearing was so obviously saintly that it was apparent even to someone who shared no part of his world with him. Such spiritual strength has made *tzaddikim* joyous when others despaired. When the great Gaon of Rogatchov, Rabbi Yosef Rosen, was suffering terribly in his final illness, he found relief from pain only when he was engaged in Talmudic discussion. For him, immersion in the Sea of the Talmud drowned the agony of illness. One contemporary *rosh yeshivah* was surprised that his students demanded air-conditioning in the middle of the summer: how could they even feel the heat when they were studying Torah? Another would ask, 'How can a student yawn while he is studying Torah; how can someone be bored or tired while he is learning?' Such people are not part of *our* exile. This attitude — and rescue — was what Jacob wished to instill, but he was not permitted to succeed.

Did he fail? No. The spiritual illumination of a Jacob is not lost. In the words of the *Zohar*, לְלִבִּי גִלִּיתִי וְלָאֲכָרִי לֹא גִלִּיתִי, *I revealed it to my heart, but to my limbs I did not reveal it.* A 'revelation to the heart' is an inner conviction, a 'revelation to the limbs' is public knowledge. Jacob could not reveal to everyone his secret of escaping the most lethal effect

*A 'revelation to the
heart' is an inner
conviction, a
'revelation to the
limbs' is public
knowledge.*

of exile, but the revelation is concealed in the Torah where it remains available to anyone who will draw it forth. The allusion to Jacob's unsuccessful attempt is contained in the first verse of *Vayechi* (by the omission of the customary space between *sidros*). rather than later in 49:1 where the event took place. But the first verse speaks of Jacob's greatest success, his ultimate 'life' in Egypt. God used that verse to show us what Jacob tried but was not permitted to do — simultaneously, however, God showed us Jacob's secret. *He found life in Egypt* — so can we. He illuminated an exile to such an extent that it was hardly felt while he lived — and that is our legacy. We need not suffer from exile if we open our eyes to see the Hand that inflicts it, the truth it contains, the Torah that illuminates it.

*God showed us
Jacob's secret. He
found life in Egypt
— so can we.*

V. Rabbi and Jacob

רבי הנה יחיב ליה בצפורין שבעה עשר שנים
וקרא על גרמיה. יחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע
עשרה שנה. יחי יהודה בצפורין שבע עשרה
שנים

Rabbi [R' Yehudah the Prince] lived in Zipori for seventeen years and proclaimed of himself: 'Jacob lived in Egypt for seventeen years. Judah lived in Zipori for seventeen years (Yerushalmi Kesubos 12:3, Bereishis Rabbah 96:9).

Rabbi's comparison of his tenure in Zipori to Jacob's in Egypt must be understood as a statement of purpose: there was a similarity between the accomplishments of those two periods. Unless he meant to impart a lofty concept, it would have been out of character for Rabbi — of whom the Talmud says, 'When Rabbi died, humility ceased to exist' (*Sotah* 49a) — to liken himself to Jacob.

*Both Jacob and
Rabbi lived on the
threshold of
bitter exiles.*

Both Jacob and Rabbi lived on the threshold of bitter exiles. Jacob came to Egypt with his family to inaugurate a sojourn of 210 years by the end of which the bulk of his offspring would have fallen to

a level of degradation barely above that of the Egyptians and of whom it would be said, 'These [the Israelites] are idol worshipers and these [the Egyptians] are idol worshipers — why should the sea split to save the Jews and then collapse upon the Egyptians?' (*Tanchuma, Beshallah*). Rabbi lived not long after the destruction of the Second Temple, at a time when Jewish life in *Eretz Yisrael* had been virtually decimated by Roman persecution and ruthless suppression of Torah study.

Each undertook the responsibility to prepare his people for survival and each did it during the last seventeen years of his life.

Both Jacob and Rabbi enjoyed the respect of their rulers: Pharaoh revered Jacob as the holy man whose arrival and blessing had ended the famine and Rabbi won the friendship and deep respect of the Roman emperor Antony. Each undertook the responsibility to prepare his people for survival in the impending exile, and each did it in a similar way during the last seventeen years of his life.

Jacob symbolizes Truth as embodied in the Torah. He studied the Torah of exile with Joseph, he dispatched Yehudah ahead of him to Egypt to establish an academy for Torah study, he designated the tribe of Levi to devote itself exclusively to Torah study and the service of God even when the other tribes entered the service of Egypt. In so doing, Jacob was planting the seed that came to fruition at Sinai. The brutal melting pot of Egypt became the crucible that prepared Israel to be the Nation of Torah [this concept will be discussed in the commentary and Overview to *Shemos*]. And Jacob buried within the nation the possibility of transcending exiles. He represents, therefore, תורה שבכתב, *the Written Torah*.

There were still many to whom Torah was life and who would not commit spiritual suicide to satisfy Roman paranoia.

Rabbi, too, confronted an impending disaster and devised an identical solution. Successive generations of Roman persecution had brought Torah scholarship to a relatively low ebb. Such great men as R' Akiva and R' Chanina ben Teradion had been tortured to death for daring to teach their students. Though there were still many to whom Torah was life and who would not commit spiritual suicide to satisfy Roman paranoia, conditions made it virtually impossible for them to study enough to memorize all

the laws and their explanations. And this was still the period of *תורה שבעל פה*, *the Oral Law*, when it was forbidden to record any Torah except for the books of Scripture. As *Nassi* [prince], Rabbi had not only the responsibility, but the authority to act. As the friend of Antony, he could secure governmental sanction.

He propounded the doctrine that the only way to preserve the knowledge of the Torah was to commit the Oral Law to writing.

He propounded the doctrine that the only way to preserve the knowledge of the Torah was to commit the Oral Law to writing. He called an assembly of the Sages to collect the laws and decide most matters in dispute. Then he recorded the major laws and principles in the *Mishnah* — the foundation of the *Talmud* and the vast body of halachic literature. His seventeen years in *Zipori* were a time of monumental accomplishment, a time that, in its way, could stand together with Jacob's seventeen years in Egypt as a true golden era of Jewish survival.

Wisely have the Sages said:

לֹא מֵאַסְתִּים וְלֹא גָעַלְתִּים לְכָלֹתָם —
 שֶׁהָעַמְדָּתִי לָהֶם בֵּית רַבִּי וְחֻכְמֵי הָדָרוֹת
 [God said of Israel in its exile] I have not
 despised them nor have I abhorred them to
 exterminate them (Leviticus 26:44) — for I
 will have established on their behalf the
 House of Rabbi and the wise men of the
 ages (Megillah 11a).

Rabbi, the great and holy teacher of Israel, looked into Jacob's seventeen years of life and perceived the secret hidden within them.

The Book of *Genesis* is one of creation. It begins with the creation of heaven and earth for the sake of Torah and Israel (see comm. to 1:1) and it ends with Jacob's 'creation' of the conditions that would enable Israel to survive in order to receive the Torah. Rabbi, the great and holy teacher of Israel, looked into Jacob's seventeen years of life and perceived the secret hidden within them. He translated the secret into a new source of life, the *Mishnah*, that remains the source and guarantor of Israel's national survival.

Rabbi Nosson Scherman
 Kislev 14, 5742

May the *Overviews in this volume*
be a source of merit for the soul of
the author's uncle

החבר ר' יצחק גדליה ב"ר מרדכי ע"ה

Mr. Julius Loeb ע"ה

נפטר ב' סכות, תשמ"ב

*A patriarch of his community,
an inspiration and joy to his family;
he was one of the select leaders who transplanted
Frankfurt to Washington Heights*

ת נ צ ב ה

סדר ויחי

Sidrah Vayechi

ויחי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁבַע עָשָׂר
 שָׁנָה וַיְחִי יַמֵּי-יַעֲקֹב שְׁנֵי חָזָיו שְׁבַע שָׁנִים
 כט וַאֲרָבָעִים וּמֵאָת שָׁנָה: וַיִּקְרְבוּ יָמָיו

SIDRAH VAYECHI

¶ Vayechi — the “closed” section.

[Following tradition, this verse begins a new *sidrah*. As a general rule, all *parshiyos* [paragraph divisions] are separated from one another in a Torah scroll by a space of at least nine letters. Our *parshah*, however, is unique in that it follows the preceding with only a one-letter division between them. *Rashi* therefore calls it סְתוּמָה, *closed*.]

Why is this section ‘closed’? — [Because this *Sidrah* comprises the account of Jacob’s death, and] as soon as Jacob our father departed this life, the hearts of the children of Israel were ‘closed’ due to the suffering and despair of the bondage which was then imposed on them. [That is, the *initial* stages of the spiritual bondage began to materialize immediately after Jacob’s death, even though the actual travails of *enslavement* did not commence until all the Tribal Ancestors had died (*Tur*).] Another reason: Jacob had desired to reveal to his children the ‘End’ [i.e., the Messianic age when Israel’s exiles would finally end], but his prophetic vision was ‘closed’ [i.e. concealed] from him (*Rashi* from *Midrash* and *Zohar*). [On Jacob’s desire to reveal the ‘End’, see *Rashi* to 49:1.]¹¹

R’ Hirsch, however, advances an

entirely different view. The superficial observer would assume that Jacob’s seventeen peaceful years surrounded by his family comprised the golden era of his life, and as such, should be separated from the narrative of his earlier, anxiety-filled years. The Torah shows us the contrary, however. Jacob’s ‘golden’ years are given no special prominence, they are not even set off from his years of hardship, because it was during his lifetime of struggle that he rose to the status of ‘Israel’ and prepared his family for its future Messianic calling. From the vantage point of the *nation*, Jacob’s earlier years were more productive than his years in Egypt; only as an *individual* did he experience greater happiness in Egypt.

28. וַיְחִי יַעֲקֹב ... שְׁבַע עָשָׂר שָׁנָה — [And] Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years.

The Torah tells us this to inform us how Jacob — though initially intending to remain in Egypt but a short time until God commanded him to the contrary [46:3f] — established his home permanently in Egypt. He did not return to Canaan after seeing Joseph, but remained in Egypt for the last seventeen years of his life (*Abarbanel*).

¶ Significance of the term יָחַי, ‘lived.’ [The unusual use of the term יָחַי, *lived*, in this context inspires comment

1. *Ramban* prefaces this *sidrah* with a theme consistent with his view in 43:14, that Jacob’s descent into the Egyptian exile is a forerunner of the Jewish nation’s descent into the exile of Edom/Rome [which traditionally refers to the current lingering exile amid Western Civilization; see above on 15:2; footnote to 14:1 p. 474; comm. to 28:12 p. 1225].

The analogy extends to a series of circumstances. Both exiles were brought about by causeless hatred between brothers. Like Jacob, who thought he would be going to a friendly king, so Agrippa, the last Jewish king during the Second Temple, went to the Roman court, to

47 ²⁸ Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years.
28-29 And the days of Jacob — the years of his life — were
one hundred and forty seven years. ²⁹ The time ap-

inasmuch as the Torah usually employs such terms as נָשַׁב, settled, or נָזַק, dwelt, to describe the years one spent in a particular place.]

It was primarily during these latter seventeen years of his life that Jacob — who endured so much suffering throughout his life — can be described as having 'lived.' He was finally united with all his children, and he enjoyed the tranquility and harmony he had always longed for. Hence, the saying 'If one's end is good, all is good' (Akeidah; Chizkuni).

The Zohar similarly expounds Lamentations 3:27, *It is good for a man that he bear a yoke in his youth*: happy is a man who is subjected to suffering in his youth, for he will ultimately enjoy tranquility. So it was with Jacob: he suffered from Esau who pursued him; from Laban who subjected him to slave-like conditions in return for his wives; from the shameful incident of Dinah and Shechem; and from Joseph who was sold and mourned for so many years. Yet, after it all, Jacob finally enjoyed tranquility.

According to Tosafos HaRosh, however, Jacob had really 'lived,' in the sense of happiness and fulfillment, for a total of thirty-four years, equivalent to the numerical value of the word נָחִי, he lived, in our verse: Seventeen years from Joseph's birth until he was sold, and seventeen years of living with Joseph in Egypt. All his other years were not really 'living,' spent as they were in grief and suffering.

Daas Zekeinim records that these

Gaius Caligula, whom he considered his intimate friend, and he thereby caused Israel to fall into Roman clutches.

As for the inhabitants of besieged Jerusalem, they were made captives because of famine, just as the family of Jacob had been compelled to leave Eretz Yisrael because of a famine.

Nevertheless the day is coming when they shall bring all your brethren out of all the nations ... upon horses and in chariots ... to My holy mountain, Jerusalem (Isaiah 66:20), even as the Egyptians ultimately accompanied Jacob's remains with great honors to the Holy Land.

The nations will be in deep sorrow when they perceive the vengeance of HASHEM. May He raise us that we may live in His presence (Hoshea 6:2).

seventeen years correspond to the seventeen which Joseph lived in Jacob's house before he was sold. Just as Jacob sustained Joseph for seventeen years, so did Joseph now sustain his father for a like period.

R' Munk observes that the sidrah which records the death of Jacob is entitled Jacob 'lived'. Similarly, the one recounting the death of Sarah is called חַיִּי שָׂרָה, the 'life' of Sarah. As the Sages tell us (Berachos 18b), the righteous continue to live on after death, because of the example which they have given and the spiritual heritage which they have bequeathed to posterity. So 'our father Jacob did not die,' as Rashi notes on 49:33.

There is an opinion that the name used here is the less spiritual one, Jacob, rather than Israel, because he did not strive to return to Eretz Yisrael during his lifetime (Maggid Mesharim; comp. footnote to v. 29).

וַיְהִי יָמֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁנֵי חַיִּי — And the days of Jacob — the years of his life — were.

[On this phraseology, see comm. above 47:8 s.v. בָּקָה.]

Baal HaTurim observes that anyone of whom it is said וַיְהִי יָמָיו, his days were, did not attain the age of his father — e.g. Chanoch and Lemech. The same is true of the expression 'drew near' with regard to death. See Rashi next verse.

שִׁבְעֵי שָׁנִים וָאַרְבָּעִים וְיָמָא שָׁנָה — One hundred and forty seven years [lit. seven years and forty and one

ויחי שְׂרָאֵל לְמוֹת וַיִּקְרָא | לִבְנוֹ לְיוֹסֵף

hundred year(s)).

Since Jacob's life was short and wrought with trouble the Torah mentions his years beginning with the smaller number first, unlike the case of Abraham and Isaac where the usual order is followed (*Baal HaTurim*).

According to R' Munk, the smaller number is given before the larger one so that the number forty-seven will be in proximity to the words שְׁנֵי חַיָּיו, *the years of his life*. That is to say, there were forty-seven years when Jacob really 'lived.' As Or HaChaim points out, that was the number of years when he was in the company of either Rachel or Joseph.

R' Hirsch notes, as he explained above [see 47:8], that *days* of life indicates the worthwhile, productive days in which someone lived. Consequently our verse stresses that all the years of Jacob's life were filled with important 'days.'

29. וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמוֹת — *The time approached for Israel to die* [lit. and *Israel's days to die approached*].^[1]

How did Jacob know that his life was drawing to a close? [After all, he should have expected his lifespan to approximate that of his father. He was now thirty-three years younger than his father had been when he died, and as Rashi notes in 27:2, one should fear death only during the five year period

before and after the age at which one's parents had died.]

— He was not really sick, but he was getting increasingly weaker and realized he would not live much longer. He therefore summoned Joseph to give him instructions about his burial wishes (*Ramban*).

Or HaChaim notes in this context that the onset of physical weakness is far from proving that death is approaching. But the righteous perceive certain symptoms thirty days before the end, when death is decreed in the celestial spheres. [See *comm.* to 50:1.] From that moment the image of God which is reflected in the human face becomes obscured.

According to *Haamek Davar* the use of the spiritual name *Israel* in this passage intimates that it was by prophetic inspiration — which is symbolized by the name *Israel* — that he was aware that he would shortly die.

Rashi notes that everyone of whom it is said that death *drew near* did not attain the age of his fathers; in this case, Isaac lived 180 years, while Jacob lived only 147. Similarly it is said of David that *his days to die drew near* [*I Kings* 2:1], and he lived to 70 while his father reached the age of 80. [The Midrash adds the case of Moses of whom *drawing near* is also used (*Deut.* 31:14). He lived 120 years compared with his father's 137.]^[2]

The Midrash discusses the concept of the literal phrase: *the days of Jacob drew near to die* (which appears to say that the days

1. R' Yose in the *Zohar* notes that in the previous verse which speaks of his *life*, he is called Jacob, whereas here, he is called Israel when his *death* is imminent. This appears inconsistent with the usual usage, for the Torah generally calls him 'Jacob' when he appears in a state of weakness, and 'Israel' in the opposite context. R' Yose explains that as Jacob's life drew to a close, all his days appeared, encircled with an aura of glory, implied by the name 'Israel.' This phenomenon proclaimed that the Patriarch would appear before the Celestial Judge at the time of his death with his supreme title of earned nobility (R' Munk; comp. R' Bachya).

2. The reason Jacob lived thirty-three years less than his father was, as noted in 47:8-9, in

themselves seemed to die. When someone's time comes, the very day [i.e. sun] refuses to go on its course and demands that person's death. Thus, the day itself is said to 'draw near' — an expression idiomatically denoting attack for battle (cf. *Deut.* 20:10) — to inexorably demand death.

According to R' Shmuel bar Nachmeni in *Midrash Tanchuma*, the meaning is: In the case of the death of the righteous their 'days' cease [i.e., they are physically lost to the world] while they themselves continue to exist ... for the righteous — even when dead — are described as living.

וַיִּקְרָא לְבְנוֹ יוֹסֵף — [So] *he called for his son, for Joseph.*

Jacob summoned Joseph to ask that he, as viceroy with the power to carry out his wishes, take responsibility to bury him in the Cave of Machpelah.

Jacob did not want to postpone the request until he was sick and on his deathbed. At that time, when he would give his final blessing to his children, he planned to formally confer Reuben's birthright on Joseph. He was concerned, therefore, that if he delayed his request to Joseph until then, it would seem as though he were giving Joseph the birthright only to elicit his promise regarding the burial, in which case it would seem as though the transfer of the birthrights was not Divinely ordained. Therefore, Jacob summoned him now, before Joseph had even an inkling of the birthright (*Haamek Davar*).

He called for **לְבְנוֹ**, *his son*, because it is a son's duty to bury his father [24:9; 35:29] (*Alshich*); and he chose **יֹסֵף**, *Joseph* [rather than

any of his other sons], because only he had the power to do so (*Rashi*).

Cf. *Tanchuma*: Why did Jacob summon neither Reuben, the eldest, nor Judah, who was destined for royalty, but instead summoned Joseph? This teaches that 'everyone honors the one who at the moment is on the ascendancy' [lit. to whom the hours stands], also because he had the capacity to 'fulfill his request.

Furthermore Joseph was the son whom God had promised would 'put his hand on Jacob's eye' [46:4; i.e. look after his burial] (*Abarbanel*).

The Midrash adds that Jacob summoned Joseph because he loved him more than all his other children. Furthermore, Jacob intimated that since he had come to Egypt on Joseph's account, the primary obligation was upon Joseph to arrange for the return of his remains to Canaan for burial.

According to *Abarbanel*, Jacob foresaw prophetically that Joseph's bones would remain in Egypt until the Exodus when the Tribal descendants would take his remains to Canaan. Jacob was apprehensive that unless he commanded Joseph to the contrary, Joseph would allow Jacob's remains as well to stay in Egypt until the Exodus. He therefore considered it necessary to adjure Joseph that he arrange burial in *Eretz Yisrael* for him as soon as possible after his death and not wait for the Redemption.

Paane'ach Raza explains that this is why Jacob found it necessary to have

punishment for having complained to Pharaoh about the suffering he endured throughout his life. Those verses contain thirty-three words.

Another reason is that Jacob's 'premature' death was an example of how 'a causeless curse comes home to roost' [see *Proverbs* 26:2]. Jacob had cursed Rachel causelessly by saying to Laban [31:32]: *with whomever you find your god, יִהְיֶה, he shall not live*. As a result Jacob's own years were diminished by thirty-three, the numerical equivalent of the word *יִהְיֶה*, *live* (*Baal HaTurim*).

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם-נָא מִצָּאתִי חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
שִׁים-נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יְרֵכִי וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי
חֶסֶד וְאַמֶּת אֶל-נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בַּמִּצְרִים:

Joseph take an oath to this effect, instead of relying on God's promise and I will surely bring you back [46:4], which implied that God Himself guaranteed Jacob's interment in Eretz Yisrael. Rather, as Tiferes Y'honasan explains, Jacob was concerned that, like Joseph, only his bones would eventually be brought to Eretz Yisrael for burial; he therefore demanded an oath that Joseph would personally see to it that his body would be buried there soon after his demise.

יְהוָה — אִם-נָא מִצָּאתִי חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ — Please — if I have found favor in your eyes.

I.e., if you really wish to fulfill the mitzvah of filial honor toward me ... (Sechel Tov).

'There is no power in the day of death' [Eccles. 8:8], observes the Midrash ... Approaching death, Jacob must humble himself before his son and plead with him [rather than command him with paternal authority. This accounts for the triple use of the word נָא, please, in this verse.]

שִׁים — נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יְרֵכִי — Please place your hand under my thigh.

— And take an oath (Rashi).

[Thigh is here a euphemism for the circumcised organ. On this form of oath, see Rashi and comm. to 24:6. At the time of the Patriarchs, this mitzvah represented their sole sacred object; it was upon this that they swore until the day of the giving of the Torah (Pirkei d' Rabbi Eliezer 39). However, the feeling of modesty held the son back from complying and taking the oath 'under Jacob's thigh.' Instead, he promised him: 'I will do as you have said' [v. 30] (Targum Yonasan).

As Rashbam notes in 24:2, Jacob used this form of oath because it is

the form used when a superior adjures an inferior, such as a master his servant or a father his son. When equals are parties to a covenant, however, כָּף אֶל כָּף, clasping of hand to hand, was used [see Ezek. 17:18]. Sometimes a treaty was made binding by dividing an animal and passing between its parts [see comm. to 15:15].

The word נָא usually means please, the connotation here being: do not resent that I am asking you to take an oath (Tosafos HaRosh). According to Or HaChaim the connotation is: Take an oath now [this is how Onkelos translates נָא]; do not delay making the promise until my actual day of death.

וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְאַמֶּת — And do kindness and truth with me.

As noted in 24:49, kindness is goodness conferred voluntarily, while truth is the fulfillment of an obligation (Ralbag). [Since both elements were present in this case, Jacob phrased his request accordingly.]

Comp. Maayan Ganim cited in Torah Sheleimah #107: My burial will be an act of truth [since as my son you have the obligation of burying my remains] whereas carrying me to Eretz Yisrael will be a kindness [inasmuch as that exceeds the normal obligation]. (Radak interprets similarly.)

Yalkut Shimoni adds that Jacob also informed Joseph that the חֶסֶד, kindness, of burying him was especially incumbent upon Joseph, since God had specifically promised him, 'Joseph will put his hand on

47 Joseph and said to him, "Please — if I have found favor
30 in your eyes, please place your hand under my thigh
and do kindness and truth with me — please do not
bury me in Egypt. ³⁰ For I will lie down with my fathers

your eyes' [46:4].

— The kindness shown to the dead is the true *חסד של אמת*, kindness of truth [i.e., sincere altruistic kindness] in that there can be no expectation that the beneficiary will return the favor (Rashi).

אֶל־נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרַיִם — Please do not bury me in Egypt.

— Even for a short time; as soon as I die transport me to Canaan. Unlike Joseph, Jacob could not be content with a pledge that his remains would be taken to Eretz Yisrael only after the Exodus [see above s.v. *וַיִּקְרָא*] (Abarbanel).

[See also citation of R' David Cohen in *comm.* to 28:13 s.v. *הָאָרֶץ* to the effect that God's promise to give Jacob the land 'whereon you lie' was contingent upon his actually returning to 'lie' in it. *Comp. -Tanchuma.*]

Do not even put me into a coffin temporarily, as is the Egyptian practice. If you do so the Egyptians might maintain that this is adequate and not allow you to carry my body away (Sforno).

According to Rashi, Jacob insisted on not being buried in Egypt for several reasons:

(a) Jacob knew that the soil of Egypt would one day be plagued with *בְּנִיָּם*, vermin [Exod. 8:12] which would swarm beneath his body [if he were to be buried there. Although the plagues did not affect Goshen, Jacob feared that the Egyptians would want to inter him in an honorable sepulchre somewhere in Egypt itself. (However, see *Aunei*

Shoham; Rambam to Avos 5:4; *Oznaim l'Torah*);

(b) those who are buried outside of Eretz Yisrael will not come to life at Resurrection until they roll through the earth to Eretz Yisrael. [This Midrashic-Talmudic interpretation (*Kesubos* 111a) is based on *Ezekiel* 37:12-14];

(c) to prevent the Egyptians from making his body [or tomb] a shrine of idol worship. [That is, since the Egyptians were all aware that the famine ended on his account, Jacob was afraid that the Egyptians would deify him after his death and venerate him. He was very concerned about this because he knew that retribution would be taken against Egypt's gods, as it says [Exodus 12:12]: *And against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments* (Midrash).]

Furthermore, Jacob was concerned that if he were indeed buried in Egypt, in his merit the Egyptians might be spared the Ten Plagues (R' Tam); additionally, he was afraid that if he allowed his remains to be buried there the Tribes would always assert that Egypt, too, was a Holy Land (*Midrash HaGadol*).

As R' Munk — drawing from R' Hirsch — explains, Jacob also wanted to establish in his posterity for all time the principle that only Eretz Yisrael is their heritage. The most effective means to do so would be to have his tomb there. He knew that his burial there would create an indestructible link between the country where the ancestors were buried and their descendants, wherever they were. They would feel the need to pray there and never give up the land to

ויחי מזל וְשָׁכַבְתִּי עִם־אֲבֹתַי וְנִשְׁאָתְנִי מִמִּצְרַיִם וּקְבַרְתֵּנִי בְּקִבְרָתָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי

their enemies. Jacob's decision was all the more imperative because he knew that his children had begun to "let themselves be possessed by the land of Goshen," as was pointed out previously (cf. our commentary to verse 27). Life in Egypt threatened to have a profound influence on them. Soon they might substitute the Nile for the Jordan and what began as a 'temporary' sojourn in Egypt would no longer seem to them an exile.

As R' Hirsch concludes, this provided sufficient motive for him to press with such ceremonious solemnity that they should not bury him in Egypt, but that they should carry him to their true homeland. This was reason enough for him to say: 'Though you may wish to live in Egypt, I refuse even to be buried here!' This is also why he used the name Israel in expressing his wish — he spoke as Israel, the bearer of the national mission.

The Midrash notes that the Patriarchs were anxious to be buried in *Eretz Yisrael* because those buried there will be the first to enjoy resurrection in the Messianic era. This is deduced from *Isaiah* 42:5: *He gives breath* [i.e., restores life] *to the people upon it* [*Eretz Yisrael*].

Furthermore, the soil of Israel itself acts as atonement for one's sins, as it is written *Deut.* 32:43: *And His land shall make atonement for His people* (*Tanchuma*). [See *Torah Temimah*].

There are many more reasons offered for Jacob's wish to be buried not in Egypt but in *Eretz Yisrael*, and, as the *Zohar* concludes, it is important to reflect on these reasons, for without them it would have been more in keeping with the Patriarch's feelings to leave his tomb near his children and descendants. For them it would have been an object of comfort and protection amid the sufferings and calamities which Egyptian exile would inflict upon them.

However, it must be recalled that when Jacob came to Egypt he was con-

cerned that the Divine Presence would abandon him for leaving *Eretz Yisrael* and his children would become assimilated among the nations. God, therefore, reassured him and said, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt ... I will go down with you to Egypt and I will also bring you up" [46:3, 4]. Jacob therefore realized that there was no need for him to be buried in Egypt and he therefore made it absolutely clear that he wanted to be buried in *Eretz Yisrael* (*Akeidah*).

30. וְשָׁכַבְתִּי עִם־אֲבֹתַי — *For I will lie down with my fathers.*

Rashi comments: This phrase connects with the previous thought, the contextual flow being: *Take this oath ... for I will eventually lie down with my fathers* [i.e., die] and you shall transport me out of Egypt and bury me in their sepulchre. Furthermore, *Rashi* emphasizes that we must avoid possibly mis-translating וְשָׁכַבְתִּי, *lie down*, as referring to *burial*, in the sense of laying Jacob to rest in burial. This translation is obviously incorrect, since burial is specifically mentioned later in the verse. As a rule, whenever the idiom *lying with one's fathers* occurs, it refers to death, not burial. See, for example, *I Kings* 2:10: *and David lay with his fathers*, and afterwards it specifically states, *and he was buried with his fathers*. [See *Ibn Ezra*.]

Jacob's assertive statement carried within it the prophetic knowledge that indeed he would repose with his fathers (*Midrash HaGadol*).

The Talmud [*Bava Basra* 116a] notes that wherever the expression *lie down* is used in connection with one's death it indicates that he left children like himself ... Similarly,

47 and you shall transport me out of Egypt and bury me
30 in their sepulchre." He said, "I personally will do as

because Jacob left twelve righteous and worthy sons like himself, his death is described as lying down. [The idea is that one who leaves a child like himself to take his place cannot be said to have really 'died'; he is rather like one who has merely 'lain down' (*Maharsha*).]

In the literal sense, *Sforno* explains that this expression refers to the custom of placing the departed on a bier where the lamentations and eulogies are held and the mourners file around it. This expression is therefore used of all the kings mentioned in the Books of Kings — righteous and wicked — who died on their beds [i.e., of natural causes].

Kabbalistically, the connotation of death referred to by the expression וְשָׁכַבְתִּי, *lie down*, refers to the

spiritual repose of the soul and its reunion with that of its righteous ancestors (see *R' Bachya*; *Tz'ror HaMor*).

וְנִשְׂאֲתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם וְקָבַרְתִּי בְּקִרְיָתִי —
And you shall transport me out of Egypt and [you shall] bury me in their sepulchre.¹¹

You personally shall see to this; and bury me in their sepulchre — the Cave of Machpelah, where there are buried the four couples [Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah] I am destined to complete (*Midrash HaGadol*).

Following *Sforno*: If you follow the procedure of this שְׁכִיבָה, *laying* my body in Egypt for the customary period of eulogy and mourning, the immediate and intense grief over my death will be assuaged and the Egyptians will not hinder you from transporting me to another country.

1. The Talmud [*Nazir* 64b-65a] uses this phrase as a Scriptural support [אֲסִיְחָתָא] for a law relating to the removal and burial of a body. The Mishnah there [*Nazir* 9:3] teaches that if a Jewish corpse is found in an area not otherwise known to be burial ground, the body may be removed to a Jewish cemetery so that the place where it was found need not be declared ritually contaminated [טָמֵא] and off-limits to Nazirites and *Kohanim* who who must maintain their ritual purity. The Mishnah rules that when the body is removed three-fingerbreadths of the adjacent soil must be removed with it, since fluids from the corpse may have seeped into the soil.

This law that adjacent soil must be removed is supported by our verse. The phrase וְנִשְׂאֲתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם, *you shall transport me out of Egypt*, may be considered superfluous since it was obvious that Jacob's burial in Canaan required his removal from Egypt. The Sages, therefore, draw a new teaching from it: it is interpreted as if it meant transport me מִמִּצְרַיִם, *with part of Egypt*. That is, with my remains take along the Egyptian soil on which my body will have rested.

Rambam notes that this is only an *asmachta*, a support verse, rather than a direct teaching, because we have no indication that Jacob was buried even temporarily in Egypt.

The commentators [see *Nazir* 14b *Tos.* s.v. נִשְׂאֲתִי and *Sanhedrin* 47b] explain that the body discussed in *Nazir* 64b is regarded as one that was buried temporarily with the intention that it would be removed to a more suitable grave, but was subsequently forgotten. If it were intended as a permanent grave, its removal would be forbidden. Similarly, if it were a *met mitenah*, an abandoned body with no relatives to take responsibility for it, it would have to be buried — and remain buried — wherever it was found. For if the body discussed in *Nazir* were of the sort that could not be moved — such as a *met mitenah* — we assume that the earlier burial would have become public knowledge, and not have come to light unexpectedly during random digging in a field.

[On the question of whether Jacob was buried even temporarily in Egypt, see *Chizkuni*; *Rvid HaZahav*; *Tzafnas Paane'ach*; *VeYosef Avraham*, and the synopsis of this topic in *Nachshoni's Hagus B'Parshiyos HaTorah*.]

ויחי לא אָעשָׂה כְּדַבְּרֶךָ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַשֹּׁכֵּעַה לִי מזל/ וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל-רֹאשׁ הַמָּטָה:

[And] he [=Joseph] said, I personally will do as you have said. [The word *personally* is intimated by the use of the emphatic pronoun אָנֹכִי rather than אֲנִי.]

— Insofar as I am able, I will do as you have said with all my power (*Sforno*).

Since Jacob had requested an oath and (see next verse), Joseph *did* swear, why was it necessary for Joseph to verbalize this seemingly superfluous reassurance? In a similar case, when Abraham adjured Eliezer with an oath, we read that Eliezer placed his hand beneath Abraham's thigh and swore to him regarding this matter [24:9] without first verbalizing any reassurance.

— Apparently Joseph wanted to emphasize that he was quite ready to fulfill his father's wishes of his own free will and an oath to that effect was unnecessary. Jacob insisted on the oath, however, as we learn in the next verse (*Or HaChaim*).

As noted above, *Targum Yonasan* similarly observes that feelings of modesty prevented Joseph from placing his hand under his father's 'thigh' so he just promised him: 'I will do as you have said.'

According to *Daas Zekeinim*, the connotation of Joseph's reply was, I, too, will do as you say, i.e., I will follow your suggestion and when I am dying I, too, will urge my brothers to take me from here [see 50:25].

31. הַשֹּׁכֵּעַה לִי וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ — 'Swear to me,' and he swore to him.

Following the opinion that Joseph wanted to avoid placing his hand under his father's 'thigh,' Jacob now suggested instead that Joseph take an oath by God's Name, which Joseph proceeded to do (*Akeidah; Ralbag; Radak; Targum Yonasan*).

The commentators emphasize that Jacob's insistence that Joseph take a formal vow did not imply any suspicion on his part that Joseph might renege on his promise unless he swore. But Jacob knew that his unwillingness to be buried in Egypt constituted an insult to the land that had given him hospitality, and accordingly Pharaoh might forbid Joseph to go to Eretz Yisrael. It was Jacob's intention to make the promise more binding, for Jacob knew it would not be proper for Pharaoh to force Joseph to violate an oath, and Joseph himself would feel more obligated to withstand adverse pressure and fulfill his father's wish if there was an oath to which he could make reference. This indeed is what occurred, for when Pharaoh granted permission to Joseph he emphasized that he was acceding solely because Jacob had imposed an oath [see *Rashi* 50:6] (*Ramban; Sforno; Kli Yakar*).

Furthermore, Jacob did not say, as did Abraham to Eliezer, וַאֲשַׁכְּנֶךָ, and I will have you swear [24:3], since Jacob did not want any implication that Joseph had been forced against his will to swear. He therefore asked Joseph to undertake the oath himself — as if he were proceeding of his own free volition (*Malbim*).

— וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל-רֹאשׁ הַמָּטָה

47 you have said."

31 ³¹ He replied, "Swear to me," and he swore to him. Then Israel prostrated himself towards the head of the bed.

Then Israel prostrated himself towards [lit. upon] the head of the bed.

Rashi explains: Then Israel prostrated himself [to Joseph]. As the proverb says, *תִּפְּלֹא בְעֵינֶיךָ קִנּוּי*, לִי, "When the fox has his hour bow down to him."

[I.e. although the lion is king, nevertheless, should the insignificant fox assume rulership, then even the regal lion should show him the proper reverence.

By Joseph's acceptance of the obligation to fulfill Jacob's burial wishes — an obligation by which Joseph risked putting himself in disgrace before Pharaoh — Jacob felt the desire to display his gratitude. Ordinarily it would have been improper for him to bow to his son, but since Joseph was a reigning, royal figure, Jacob bowed to him in keeping with the proverb quoted by Rashi. Jacob, therefore, paid him this gesture in supreme tribute (Mizrachi; Gur Aryeh).

The allusion, according to this interpretation, *עַל רֹאשׁ מִטָּה*, at the head of the bed, is explained by Maharshal ibid. as alluding to Joseph who was now 'at the head' of Jacob's descendants — bed being a metaphor for - descendants.

According to one view in *Midrash Tanchuma*, this bowing to Joseph finally constituted the fulfillment of Joseph's early dream in which the sun (his father) bowed to him.

Rashbam renders: Jacob prostrated himself towards Joseph, from where he [Jacob] was, at the head of the bed.

Rashi continues that, as implied by the expression *עַל רֹאשׁ הַמִּטָּה*, upon [i.e. toward or at] the head of the bed, Jacob — [while bowing in gratitude to Joseph] — turned himself toward the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence). The Rabbis [see *Shabbos* 12a and *Nedarim* 40a] derive from this that the *Shechinah* is above the head of a sick person.

Ordinarily, in bowing toward Joseph,

Jacob would have, in effect, placed his back toward the *Shechinah* which was above his head — a mark of disrespect. To avoid this, he inclined himself toward [by having the meaning of *אֵל*] the head of the bed so his bowing would be towards the *Shechinah* — in a display of both gratitude to Joseph and respect to the *Shechinah*. That Jacob is here called 'sick' although he had not yet become ill, is explained by Gur Aryeh. Jacob is called sick because of the general decline of his strength and vigor. The Rabbis in *Nedarim* 40a actually derive that the *Shechinah* hovers above the bed of a sick person from *Psalms* 41:4. That it hovers above the head of the bed is, according to Rashi, derived from our passage.

Alternatively, Rashi interprets: Jacob bowed [in thanks to God] regarding the excellence of his bed [i.e. of his progeny — ראש, head, referring to choicest quality (as in *Exodus* 30:23 ראש בְּשָׂמִים, choicest spices), and מִטָּה, bed, being a metaphor for children], for Jacob's 'bed' was 'whole' שְׁהֵיָה מִטָּה, That is, his progeny were all whole-hearted with God] and none of them was wicked. For although Joseph was a viceroy, and although he had been a captive among heathens, he adhered to righteousness. [It was at this juncture, when the thought of his death inspired Jacob to elicit the oath from Joseph, that Jacob showed gratitude to God for having granted him the merit of unblemished progeny. He had been particularly concerned because Abraham had had his Ishmael, and Isaac his Esau, and Jacob — for the reasons noted — was always worried that Joseph had become blemished in Egypt. But as he now perceived, Joseph had remained good and virtuous.] (The bracketed explanations are culled

ויוחי מ/ח-א ב א ויהי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיֹּאמֶר לְיוֹסֵף
הִנֵּה אֲבִיךָ חָלָה וַיִּקָּח אֶת-שָׁנָי בְּנָיו עִמּוֹ
ב אֶת-מִנְשָׁה וְאֶת-אֶפְרַיִם: וַיָּגֵד לְיַעֲקֹב

from Mizrahi; Zohar; Tzeidah laDerech and Akeidah).¹¹

Sforno interprets: Jacob prostrated himself in gratitude to his Creator for having graciously allowed him to achieve this [promise of burial] from his son. Similar to

this is 24:52 where it is recorded that when Eliezer heard Rebecca's family consent to his proposal that she accompany him home to marry his master, *he prostrated himself to the ground unto HASHEM* in gratitude and joy.

XLVIII

1. Jacob's illness.

After Joseph returned from visiting his father in Goshen, Jacob became ill. When Joseph was informed, he brought his two sons so that Jacob would bless them (Ramban 47:29).

וַיָּהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה — *And it came to pass after these things.*

I.e., after Jacob had arranged to be buried in Eretz Yisrael (Oznaim L'Torah).

According to the Rabbinic chronology, several months elapsed since the preceding.

[As explained in the *comm.* to 22:20 the use of the Hebrew term for *after* — אַחֲרֵי — denotes either that some time has elapsed since the preceding event (in this case less than a year), or it denotes that the following episode occurred after 'deep reflection' on the part of the main subject.]

According to *Midrash HaGadol*, in our context the phrase refers to thoughts that had disturbed the

Patriarch since his coming down to Egypt: Was he going to die and be buried in Egypt, and would his children then settle down in this land, and lose themselves in the Egyptian population? These grave sources of anxiety had just been dispelled by Joseph's oath, and the Patriarch felt fully confident that the promise he had received from God would be carried out to the letter: "I shall also bring you up from there (from Egypt), and Joseph will place his hand over your eyes [46:4]." It was after these reassuring thoughts that an illness made Jacob aware that his time was drawing near.

וַיֹּאמֶר לְיוֹסֵף — *That someone said to Joseph.*

The Hebrew literally reads *And he said to Joseph*. The subject in this elliptic phrase is unidentified; it was told to Joseph by whomever it was. This is a common Biblical style (Rashi; Ibn Ezra).

Rashi continues that according to

1. Joseph lived a total of 110 years. By this time Joseph was 56 years old and had already lived the majority of his life. The accounting is as follows: He was 30 when he stood before Pharaoh; add to this the 7 years of plenty and 2 years of famine at which time his father came to Egypt, plus the 17 years that Jacob had dwelt in Egypt.

Thus, since Joseph attained more than half his lifespan without sinning, Jacob now felt assured that Joseph would not sin for the duration of his life. As the Talmud [Yoma 38b] notes: 'When the majority of a man's years have passed without sin, he will not sin any more' (Meshech Chochmah).

48 ¹ And it came to pass after these things that someone
 1 said to Joseph, "Behold! your father is ill." So he
 took his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, with him.

the Midrash it was Ephraim who informed Joseph. Ephraim frequently studied under Jacob and when the latter became ill in Goshen, Ephraim rushed to his father in Egypt and brought him the news.

Other versions in *Midrash Rabbah* read: Who told him? Some say, Benjamin; others, the Divine Spirit.

From the fact that Joseph had to be informed of his father's illness, it would appear that Joseph did not spend much time with him.

This points to Joseph's noble character. He avoided being alone with his father since he feared that Jacob would inquire regarding the circumstances of how he got to Egypt, and the conversation might lead to a revelation of the sale and the behavior of his brothers. He feared that he would thereby provoke his father's wrath against his brothers and this would result in a great upheaval. Witness the effects of Jacob's unwitting curse which resulted in Rachel's death on the road to Ephrath [35:17]. How much more devastating would the effects of Jacob's purposeful wrath be! (*Tosafos HaRosh*).

הִנֵּה אָבִירָה חֹלָה — Behold! your father is ill.⁽¹⁾

The term *הִנֵּה*, *behold*, denotes in many contexts, the unexpected and unusual.

וַיֵּקַח אֶת־שְׁנֵי בָנָיו עִמּוֹ אֶת־מְנַשֶּׁה וְאֶת־עֲפְרָיִם — So he took his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, with him.

That Jacob might bless them before he died (*Rashi*).

The naming of the sons seems to be redundant since we know that they were Joseph's only two sons. The names are given to signify that they were worthy of receiving the Patriarch's blessing both because they were Joseph's sons, and because of their personal merit as Ephraim and Manasseh — each a worthy personage in his own right. This is further intimated by the indefinite article *אֶת* preceding each name, giving each one individual significance (*Akeidah*; *Or HaChaim*).

2. וַיֹּגֵד לְיַעֲקֹב — Jacob was told.

The Hebrew literally reads *he* [i.e., *someone*] told Jacob. Here, too, the Torah does not identify who

1. Jacob, the first to experience fatal illness.

Until Jacob, no person ever experienced illness. Instead one would suddenly sneeze and his soul would depart through his nostrils. [At Creation, God blew into Adam's nostrils the soul of life (2:7); therefore, by sneezing, the soul, in a sense, is expelled through that very same passage and it returns to its abode (*Radak*).] But Jacob prayed that God grant people a short period of illness prior to death. One would thereby have a warning that he was about to die, thus providing him the opportunity to settle his worldly affairs and give final instructions to his children and household who would have the opportunity to be present at the time of his death. Jacob's prayer was granted [and the illness recorded in our verse was the first illness ever experienced.] ... We therefore have the custom when one sneezes to say 'to life!' [or 'to health!'] since sneezing was once a moment of mortal danger (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 52; *Bereishis Rabbah*; *Bava Metzia* 67a; *Maharsha* *ibid.*; *Sanhedrin* 107b; *Rashi* *ibid.*; cf. *Yalkut HaMachiri Proverbs* 20:28; *Berachos* 53a).

In *Bava Basra* 16b [see *comm.* to 24:1 (footnote p. 892)] we learn that Abraham had a precious stone suspended from his neck, which brought an immediate cure to any 'sick' person who gazed upon it. *Tosafos* s.v. שָׁמַל explains that this is no contradiction to the citation above that there was no illness until Jacob requested it. In Abraham's case, the word *sick* means 'wounded,' while in Jacob's the reference is to fatal illness.

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה בְנִי יוֹסֵף בָּא אֵלַיךְ וַיִּתְחַזֵּק
יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּשֶׁב עַל-הַמֶּטֶה: וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב
אֶל-יוֹסֵף אֵל שְׁדֵי נִרְאָה-אֵלַי בְּלוֹז בְּאֶרֶץ
בְּנָעַן וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתִי: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי הִנְנִי מִפְּרֶךְ
וְהַרְבִּיתִּךְ וַנִּתְתִּיךְ לָקֵהַל עַמִּים וְנִתְתִּי

told him. There are many such elliptical verses (*Rashi*).

The Midrash derives a standard of etiquette from this passage telling that someone went to announce Joseph's arrival. One should not walk in unexpectedly on a sick person, lest he shame him, but wait to be announced.

Behold! — הִנֵּה בְנִי יוֹסֵף בָּא אֵלַיךְ
your son Joseph has come to you.

Such visits, as noted in v. 1, were unusual. Therefore the use of the term *behold*, *הִנֵּה*, which in many contexts denotes the unexpected (*Ralbag*).

So — וַיִּתְחַזֵּק יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּשֶׁב עַל הַמֶּטֶה
Israel exerted himself and sat up on the bed.

Jacob said, 'Though he is my son he is of royal rank; therefore I must pay him honor!' From this we learn that honor must be paid to royalty [see *Menachos* 98a]. Similarly Moses honored Pharaoh [see *Rashi* to *Exodus* 11:8], as did Elijah who ran before Ahab [I *Kings* 18:46] (*Rashi*).

In this case although it was Joseph who was coming for a favor, Jacob paid him honor, because, as *Rashi* explains, Joseph was of royal rank. The context here is different from 47:31 where Jacob was requesting a favor from Joseph. This explains why *Rashi* offers differing insights in both cases [see comm. above] (*Sifsei Chachomim*).

The phrase implies that Jacob sat with his feet upon the ground, as implicit in v. 12 where we are told that

Joseph then removed them from his [Jacob's] knees. The Torah tells us this to inform us of Jacob's extraordinary strength; his entire last will and testament was transmitted while he sat on the bed with his feet upon the ground. Only when he finished *did he draw his feet into the bed* [49:33], and then he immediately expired (*Rashbam*).

Daas Zekeinim explains that Jacob did not want to bless his children while lying in bed lest it appear that he was making a death-bed gift and was not really in full possession of his senses. He, therefore, mustered up all his strength to remain seated on his bed throughout, to show that he was in full control of his faculties.

3. The birthright is transferred to Joseph.

Jacob formally makes Ephraim and Manasseh equal to any of his other sons — in effect adopting them as his own — thereby transferring to Joseph a double portion of the inheritance.

El — אֵל שְׁדֵי נִרְאָה אֵלַי בְּלוֹז בְּאֶרֶץ בְּנָעַן
El Shaddai had appeared to me in Luz in the land of Canaan.

The reference is to the revelation in 35:9ff on Jacob's return from Paddan Aram, when God — in His Aspect of El Shaddai — said to him: *I am El Shaddai; be fruitful and multiply ...* (*Rashbam*; *Radak*).

[Comp. also the revelation in 28:13, and the blessing Isaac conferred upon Jacob in 28:3.]

48 ² Jacob was told, "Behold! your son Joseph has come
2-4 to you." So Israel exerted himself and sat up on the
bed. ³ Jacob said to Joseph, "El Shaddai had appeared
to me in Luz in the land of Canaan and He blessed me.
⁴ He said to me 'Behold: I will make you fruitful and
numerous; I will make you a congregation of peoples,

Luz is the original name of the site; Jacob renamed it Beth El [see 28:19; 35:6].

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתִי — And He blessed me.

— With a blessing sufficient even for my grandchildren. He promised me the Land as an eternal inheritance for my descendants; now I am conferring the firstborn privileges of that inheritance upon your two sons (*Radak; Abarbanel*).

4. הִנְנִי מְפַרֵךְ וְהִרְבִּיתִּיךָ וְנִתְחַיֵּךְ לְקֹהֵל עַמִּים — Behold: I will make you fruitful and numerous [lit. I am fructifying you and I will make you numerous]; and I will make you a congregation of peoples.

— "He informed me that there will yet descend from me a congregation of peoples [i.e., additional progeny besides the eleven sons I had at that time. (This rendering of *Rashi* follows *Maskil l'David* who notes that the printed versions which read עַמִּים וְקֹהֵל, 'a congregation and peoples' are in error.)] Although God had promised that a nation and a congregation of na-

tions would descend from me [I do not refer now to His promise of a new nation, since] by nation God alluded to Benjamin [who was born after the promise was made]. By a congregation of nations, God intimated that two more besides Benjamin would descend from me to become nations. Consequently, since no more sons were born to me, I assume that one of my sons was intended to branch out into two tribes, and it is that blessing that I now confer upon you (*Rashi* from *Pesikta*; comp. *Rashi* to 35:11).¹¹

[The passage to which Jacob alludes literally reads: Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a congregation of nations (גוֹי וְקֹהֵל גוֹיִם) shall descend from you. The commentators perceive גוֹיִם, nations, and עַמִּים, peoples, to be essentially synonymous in this context except, as *R' Kitov* observes, the original blessing was uttered in *Eretz Yisrael* and therefore the word גוֹי, nation, was used, since Israel can be called a nation only when in *Eretz Yisrael*. (See also Israel's blessing to Jacob in 28:3. See also *Ramban* to 17:6 לגוֹיִם. *Onkelos* renders: ... a congregation of tribes.)]

1. That the birthright was taken from Reuben is discussed in the comm. to 35:22 and 49:4. That it was transferred to Joseph is explicitly stated in *I Chronicles* 5:1.

However, why was Joseph chosen above Jacob's other sons?

Chizkuni cites the Talmud that Joseph earned the birthright because he sustained the family during the famine. Alternately, he suggests that Joseph was the firstborn of Jacob's primary wife, Rachel. Additionally, Jacob wanted Rachel to have more than the concubines (Bilhah and Zilpah, each of whom had two tribes).

According to the *Arizal*, Ephraim and Manasseh would have been begotten by Jacob had Reuben not transposed his couch in the matter of Bilhah. See comm. to 35:22 [footnote to page 1523]. Jacob therefore bestowed this tribal right on them since he considered them his own.

אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְזֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אַחֲזָה
 ה עוֹלָם: וְעָתָה שְׁנֵי-בָנֶיךָ הַנּוֹלָדִים לָךְ
 בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עִדְ-בָּאִי אֵלֶיךָ מִצְרֵימָה
 לִי-הֵם אֶפְרַיִם וּמְנַשֶּׁה כְּרֹאשׁוֹן וְשִׁמְעוֹן
 ו יִהְיוּ-לִי: וּמוֹלַדְתְּךָ אֲשֶׁר-הוֹלַדְתָּ
 אַחֲרֵיהֶם לָךְ יִהְיוּ עַל שֵׁם אֲחֵיהֶם יִקְרָאוּ

וְנָתַתִּי אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְזֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ
 — *And I will give this land to your offspring after you as a permanent possession.*

Even when Israel's descendants are temporarily exiled from their Land, their inalienable right to it is not diminished (*Akeidah*).

5. וְעַתָּה — *And now.*

I.e., since God has promised me the land I am entitled to give it to whomever I wish, and I accordingly pronounce you to be my firstborn in this regard so you can receive the inheritance of two tribes (*Rashbam*).

שְׁנֵי-בָנֶיךָ הַנּוֹלָדִים לָךְ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עִדְ-
 בָּאִי אֵלֶיךָ מִצְרֵימָה — *Your two sons who were born to you in Egypt before [lit. until] my coming to you in [lit. to] Egypt.*

I.e., who were born to you between the time you left me and the time I came to you in Egypt (*Rashi*).

— A reference to Ephraim and Manasseh; (*Rashbam*).

In the Talmud, *Nedarim* 30b, there is a controversy affecting the connotation of oaths. If someone makes an oath affecting נולדים, does he mean living children or children who will be born in the future? That is, does the word נולדים [lit. are born] have a past-tense implication: *have been born*, or future: *shall be born*? Our passage is cited to prove that the former is the case, while *I Kings* 13:2 is cited to prove the latter. The conclusion is that the word can have either meaning, and in Biblical usage its definition depends on the context.

— *Shall be mine.*

They shall be counted among my other sons [not like my grandsons], each to have his own territory exactly like each of my other sons (*Rashi*).

On the Kabbalistic reason that Jacob considered Manasseh and Ephraim as his own sons, see *Arizal* and *Malbim* cited on p. 1523.

Sforno renders: *Shall be mine* — for it was only them that God granted me to see together with you. *Comp. v. 11 below: I never expected to see your face again, and here God has allowed me to see your children as well.*

אֶפְרַיִם וּמְנַשֶּׁה כְּרֹאשׁוֹן וְשִׁמְעוֹן יִהְיוּ-לִי
 — *Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine like Reuben and Simeon.*

Just as Reuben and Simeon — my own sons — will be tribes, so will they (*Midrash*).

[That Jacob mentioned the younger son Ephraim before the firstborn Manasseh was quite intentional and he later gives him precedence in his blessing as well. Jacob's justification is given in v. 19 below.]

The Talmud (*Kesubos* 72a) cites our passage as an illustration that 'grandchildren are considered as children' [see also *Pirkei d' Rabbi Eliezer* 836], and rules that a man has the right to divorce his wife — and she forfeits her *kesubah*, marriage settlement — if she curses her husband's parents either to his face, or in the presence of his children, because this is tantamount to cursing her husband, an offense for which he is

48 and I will give this land to your offspring after you as a
5-6 permanent possession.⁵ And now, your two sons who
 were born to you in Egypt before my coming to you in
 Egypt shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be
 mine like Reuben and Simeon.⁶ But progeny born to
 you after them shall be yours; they will be included

permitted to divorce her (*Tosafos Rid*; cf. *Ritva*).

6. וּמִוֹלְדֶתָּךְ אֲחֵיהֶם לָךְ
 [lit. whom you shall beget]¹¹ after
 them shall be yours.

❧ The territorial effects of Manasseh
 and Ephraim's elevation to the status of
 tribes.

[According to *Rashi*, Manasseh and Ephraim's elevation to the status of tribes was primarily prestigious in nature, meaning that each bore the title of a separate tribe, had its own banner and encampment in the Wilderness, and cast lots for the division of territory in *Eretz Yisrael*. However, whether or not they were separate tribes had no bearing on the amount of territory they would receive in *Eretz Yisrael* since each eligible Jew received an equal piece of land; thus, two tribes totaling 70,000 people would receive the same territory as a single tribe of equal population.]

— If you beget any more children, they will not be included among my sons. Instead, they will be included in the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, and they will not bear the title of separate tribes regarding the divi-

sion of *Eretz Yisrael* (*Rashi*).

Rashi continues: Now even though *Eretz Yisrael* was divided on a *per capita* basis, as it is written [Numbers 26:54]: To the more numerous you shall give a larger inheritance, so that each person received an equal share — except for firstborns who received double shares — nevertheless only Manasseh and Ephraim of Joseph's sons would be separate tribes with respect to casting lots by tribe for the division of the land [ibid. v. 55], and the right to have their own prince and flag (*Rashi*). [See also *Rashi* to Numbers 26:56].

The intent of *Rashi's* comment is as follows: Although the land was divided among the twelve tribes, the sizes of their respective territories were unequal and dependent upon their population. A tribe with many members received a larger territory than one with less members. When Scripture says that the land was divided by lots [Numbers 26:55], it means that a tribe's general location — north or south, mountain or plain, and so on — would be determined by lots, but the size of the respective

1. *Rashi* interprets הוֹלִדְתָּךְ in the imperfect future: *whom you shall beget*, rather than past tense: *whom you have begotten*. This is necessitated by the fact that it is nowhere recorded that children other than Ephraim and Manasseh had been born to Joseph up to that time.

Ramban [v. 15 below] citing *Onkelos* — also interprets הוֹלִדְתָּךְ as future tense, but maintains that Joseph must have had more children after this blessing, since Jacob's words would not be in vain. That is why Jacob took pains to be so specific in these two verses instead of saying simply, *And now your sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you, shall be mine, like Reuben and Simeon*. However, the Torah does not identify these additional children [since they were absorbed into the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh].

Akeidah concurs that no other sons had been born as yet, but he, like *Ramban*, emphasizes that the prophet [Jacob] would not have spoken in vain, and it is to be presumed that other children were subsequently born to Joseph. [Comp. *Rashbam* to 41:50.]

portions would depend on the population of the individual tribes. Thus, Jacob declared: Let Manasseh and Ephraim come and claim separate territories like my other sons, with the size of their portions — like those of the other tribes — based upon their populations. They will not be like my grandchildren, Chanoch and Pallu, sons of Reuben, who could claim land only secondarily, as members of their father's tribe. However, other children born to Joseph will be considered part of Manasseh or Ephraim and receive portions within their territories.

By the phrase, "Now even though Eretz Yisrael was divided on a *per capita* basis," Rashi meant: Since in any event all individuals received *equal amounts of territory*, what difference did it make if Joseph's other sons were or were not considered separate tribes? Rashi acknowledges that subsequent sons of Joseph were not inferior to Ephraim and Manasseh in terms of allotment of territory; but they would not have the status of separate tribes and would therefore not have their own princes or tribal banners as did Ephraim and Manasseh [nor would they be included in the lots to determine the part of Eretz Yisrael where they would receive their portions] (*Sefer Zikaron*).

Ramban disagrees.

Ramban disagrees with Rashi's thesis that Jacob's granting of the birthright to Joseph meant only that his sons would have tribes named after them — and did not affect the size of each individual's territory. Ramban cites the end of our verse, 'they will be included under the names of their brothers with regard to their inheritance,' which, he maintains, intimates that Joseph would enjoy a territorial advantage as well by virtue of Manasseh and Ephraim's designation as tribes. He also cites the Talmud, *Horayos* 6b

and *Bava Basra* 123, to the effect that Joseph's right of the firstborn involved the firstborn's right of double territorial inheritance for his tribe (as will be explained below), which contradicts Rashi's assertion that no territorial advantage was involved.

Rather — Ramban continues — the land was not divided merely by total population, the more populous tribes taking a larger share *per capita* than the less populous, for in that case there would be no territorial advantage to Joseph's being granted the rights of the firstborn. Additionally, it is nowhere suggested in Scripture that *individual descendants* of Joseph received a double portion of territory — only that the gift of the birthright meant that *Joseph's sons* would be considered 'like Reuben and Simeon' meaning that Ephraim and Manasseh would form separate tribes, with the associated territorial benefits this would accrue to them.

For, as Ramban maintains, the Land was divided into *twelve equal parts*, irrespective of the number of members of each tribe — with for example, Simeon, the least populous tribe, receiving a territory equal in size to Judah's. Thus, Joseph's birthright entitled him to a double territorial share inasmuch as two of his children formed full-fledged tribes, each receiving an equal portion of land. The verse in *Numbers* cited by Rashi, to the numerous *you shall give a large inheritance*, refers to the fact that each tribal portion was internally divided equally among the members of the clans of paternal families (בְּתֵי אֲבוֹת) within each tribe, and the more

48 under the name of their brothers with regard to their inheritance. ⁷ But as for me — when I came from Pad-

populous clans received larger sections of the tribe's territory than the less populous ones. [See *Sifre Pinchas* #132, and *comm.* to *Numbers* 26:54.]

[In effect, then, each member of Judah, the largest tribe, received a much smaller portion than each member of Simeon, the smallest tribe; Judah's portion was divided among many more people than was Simeon's.]

Ramban concludes that even if we were to admit that the Land was divided *per capita* according to the number of individuals — as the passage in *Numbers* 26:54 seems to indicate [and which *Rashi*, following one view in the Talmud, interprets accordingly] — we must assume that Joseph received a territorial advantage. Accordingly, if the Land was divided *per capita*, we must suggest that each descendant of Joseph received an ordinary portion equal to members of other tribes, plus an additional portion representing the added share of firstborn. Whatever the interpretation, however, Jacob's gift of the birthright to Joseph — via his children Ephraim and Manasseh — was more than merely nominal.

As the commentators note, the controversy between *Rashi* and *Ramban* reflects differing views found in *Bava Basra* 121b. *Rashi* chose the exegesis that he perceives to more closely reflect the literal meaning of the text in *Numbers*, as *Ramban* himself appears to admit in the latter part of his comment regarding the question of how the Land was divided. It is regarding the question of whether Joseph's 'birthright' was merely nominal or resulted in more territory for his descendants that *Rashi* and *Ramban* differ. See *Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh* and *Levush*.

Sforno interprets that 'your progeny' refers to Joseph's grandchildren, not future sons. Joseph was told that they ... shall be yours in the sense that they would be called the House of Joseph

and would be blessed as a result of Jacob's blessing to Joseph.

על שם אחיהם יקראו בנחלתם — They will be included under [lit. they will be called by] the name of their brothers with regard to their inheritance.

Following *Rashi*: No tribes will be named after such subsequent children; they will be part of Ephraim and Manasseh's tribes.

Following *Ramban*: There will be no further independent tribal allotment of territories for such children; they will inherit portions in the territories of Ephraim and Manasseh.

Rashbam: They — i.e. the sons or grandsons subsequently born — will not form independent tribes but will form independent families, among whom the Land was eventually apportioned as noted in *Bava Basra* 118b and Scripturally in *Numbers* 26:53-55.

7. ואני בבאי מפקן — But as for me, when I came from Paddan ...

[How this statement fits in the context of the chapter is unclear. *Rashi* connects it with Jacob's earlier request that Joseph inter him in Canaan, and perceives this statement as Jacob's anticipation of Joseph's unspoken complaint. In fairness, how could Jacob ask to be taken for burial to the Cave of Machpelah when he did not do the same for Rachel, who died on the way home from Paddan? Apparently Jacob sensed that Joseph harbored resentment about this, and he seized this opportunity to justify his action]:

But as for me — although I trou-

רָחֵל בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּעוֹד כְּבָרֶת־
אֶרֶץ לְבֹא אֶפְרָתָה וְאֶקְבְּרָהּ שָׁם בְּדֶרֶךְ
אֶפְרָת הָיָה בֵּית לָחֶם: וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־

ויחי
מח/ו

ble you to transport me for burial in the land of Canaan, while I did not do this for your mother [i.e., I buried her by the roadside where she died] even though she died but a short distance from Bethlehem; nevertheless be aware that I did so by the command of God (*Rashi*; see continuation, and other views below).

According to *Rashbam*, the continuity is different. Having related in v. 3 that God blessed him on his return from Paddan Aram, Jacob now continued that it was after those blessings on that same road that Rachel had died. Following this view, many commentators interpret Jacob's statement to imply: The fact that Rachel died soon after God promised me a congregation of peoples made it clear that this promise would be realized through *grandchildren* from her whom I would consider as my own sons. It is accordingly *your* sons, Ephraim and

Manasseh, whom I so consider and upon whom I bestow the birthright.

חֵל — מתה עלי — *Rachel died on me.*⁽¹⁾

I.e., suddenly. Comp. *Numbers* 6:9 where *on* is also used in this sense (*Ibn Ezra*; *HaRechasim le-Bik'ah*).

— *While there was still a stretch of land to go [lit. to come] to Ephrath* [identified below with Bethlehem].

I.e. it was but a short distance to Bethlehem. The term "*kiurah* of land," refers to a measure equal to 2,000 cubits [about ¾ of a mile] — the distance outside a city one is permitted to walk on the Sabbath (תחום שבת). This follows the view of R' Moshe HaDarshan. According to the Midrash, Jacob used the word *kiurah*, related to *kvarah*, a sieve, to describe the terrain. He was telling Joseph: *The land on the way to Ephrath was still sieve-like*, i.e., "Do not imagine that rains and

1. The *Talmud* [*Sanhedrin* 22b] derives from the superfluous word *עָלַי*, *on me*, that אֵין מֵתָה אֵלָא לְבַעֲלָהּ, *a woman dies only to her husband* [i.e., it is the husband who primarily feels her loss; hence Jacob emphasized: Rachel died on me]. That, conversely, *a man dies only to his wife* is inferred from the verse *And Elimelech Naomi's husband died* [*Ruth* 1:3], implying that it was primarily as *Naomi's husband* that he died; others did not feel his loss as much as she.

[Comp. 42:36 *עָלַי הָיָה כָּלָהּ*, *upon me has it all fallen*, where *עָלַי*, *upon me*, similarly means: it has primarily affected me. *Radak* cites 33:13, וְיֹצֵאֵן וְהִקְרָה עֲלוֹת צֶלִי, *and the nursing flocks and the herds are upon me*.]

— Of all the tribulations I had ever experienced, her death befell me the hardest (*Midrash HaGadol*).

A further implication of the expression *died on me*, is that it was a lament on Jacob's part that Rachel had died *through him*, i.e., as a result of the curse he had uttered when confronted by Laban about the stolen *teraphim* [31:32 or because Jacob had delayed in fulfilling his vow, as a result of which his wife died prematurely (*Rosh Hashanah* 6a; see *comm.* to 35:19 and *Meshech Chochmah* to 35:19)] (Or *HaChaim*; *Lekach Tov*; see footnote on p. 1359). — [The accountability for her death remains mine (R' David Feinstein).]

Meshech Chochmah to our verse accordingly comments that Jacob was concerned that Joseph might delay fulfillment of his vow to bury him in *Eretz Yisrael*. He therefore intimated that Rachel died *through him* because he had delayed a vow.

48 dan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the
7 road, while there was still a stretch of land to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem."

mud prevented me from bringing her to Hebron for burial; it was the dry season [following the rainy season], when the earth is [very dry, and] riddled with holes like a sieve" — a time when the land is easily passable. [Following either interpretation, Jacob told Joseph that although it had been possible for him to bring Rachel's body to Hebron for burial in the cave, he buried her by the roadside — as *Rashi* continues below — at the Divine command] (*Rashi*; see also *Rashi* to 35:16 and other *comm.* there).

Rashi continues that *Onkelos* rendered the expression בְּכֶרֶת אֶרֶץ as כְּרִיב אֶרֶץ, i.e., an area of land that can be plowed in a full day. 'And I maintain,' notes *Rashi*, 'that they had a definite measure of land which they referred to as 'one full furrow.' Comp. the Talmudic terms for plowing, כְּרִיב, and בְּרִקָּא, in

Bava Metzia 107a and *Yoma* 43b respectively.

According to *Rashbam* the implication was that it was a long distance to Bethlehem, and Jacob thereby explained the impossibility of bringing Rachel to Machpelah.

וְאֶבְרָהָהָ שָׁם בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרַת הוּא בֵּית לָחֶם — And I buried her there on the road to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem [see 35:19].

Rashi continues: '... And I did not carry her even the short distance to Bethlehem to bring her into the Land.¹ I know that in your heart you bear a grievance against me. Know, however, that it was by the command of God that I buried her there so that she might be of help to her children, when Nebuzaradan [the chief general of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (see *II Kings* 25:8ff)] would lead Israel into captivity [after the destruction of the First Temple]. For we find that when the Jews were passing

1. *Ramban* writes that he does not comprehend why *Rashi* says: 'And I did not carry her even the short distance to Bethlehem to bring her into the Land' (which would appear to imply that Jacob was apologizing for having not buried her within Eretz Yisrael, which is not the case as the area of Bethlehem is part of Eretz Yisrael, as *Ramban* proceeds to emphasize).

'Was she then buried outside the Land?' *Ramban* queries. 'Heaven forbid! She died within the Land and was buried there, as it is explicitly written in our verse Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan. And in the narrative of her death it is stated even more clearly that her death occurred after Jacob departed from Luz/Bethel in the land of Canaan [35:6] and she died in the region between Bethel and the Ephrathite Bethlehem in Eretz Yisrael.'

Mizrachi defends *Rashi* by suggesting that *Rashi* used the term הָאֶרֶץ, the land, in the sense of not having brought Rachel נְשִׁכָּת לָאֶרֶץ, to populated territory, i.e., the city, but instead buried her on the then-desolate roadside.

Chasam Sofer offers a novel interpretation: Although Eretz Yisrael was established as a heritage from our Forefathers, it was not sanctified until Joshua sanctified it at the time of his conquest. Prior to its sanctification it had the status of land outside of Eretz Yisrael except for the Cave of Machpelah which Abraham had purchased and the site of the altar which Jacob had purchased in Shechem. Theoretically had Jacob brought Rachel into Bethlehem and purchased a burial site there, that site too would have achieved the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael. But having buried her on the roadside in ownerless property, the area remained unsanctified until the conquest by Joshua, and *Rashi* alludes to this in his comment.

ט בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף נִיאָמַר מִי־אֵלֶּה: וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף
אֶל־אֲבֹיו בְּנֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לִי אֱלֹהִים

along that road, Rachel ascended over her grave, and wept, beseeching mercy upon them, as it is said [Jeremiah 31:15ff]: *A voice is heard on high, the sound of lamentation ... Rachel weeping for her children ... The Holy One, Blessed is He, replied to her: Withhold your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work shall be rewarded, says HASHEM ... and your children will return to their own border.* [Based upon the Midrash.]

Ramban cites this Midrashic interpretation cited by Rashi that Rachel was buried on the roadside so she could later plead for her descendants. He suggests that the Midrash finds a Scriptural allusion to this interpretation in this verse's dual usage of the word בְּדֶרֶךְ, *on the road*, as if to emphasize the significance of her dying *on the road*, for she died on the road her descendants would some day pass. He observes that Scripture does not fully explain future events but alludes to them in a general manner.

However, in pursuing the literal sense of the verse [i.e. without the Midrashic interpretation that Jacob was Divinely inspired to bury Rachel there on the road so she could later plead for her children], Ramban maintains that Jacob was *apologizing* to Joseph for not having buried Rachel in the Cave of Machpelah, where he buried Leah. Jacob emphasized that at least Rachel was buried in *Eretz Yisrael*, in contrast to himself, for Jacob was about to die in Egypt and was anxious for assurance that he would be buried in *Eretz Yisrael*, notwithstanding Joseph's possible grievance. Furthermore, the implication of עָלַי, *on me*, was that Rachel died on the road *suddenly*, and though it was but a relatively short distance to Hebron, it was impossible for him to leave his children and flocks on the road and hurry on to Machpelah, nor could

he find any doctors to embalm her for a journey which, burdened as he was with his family, would take at least several days. The Sages [Moed Katan 27a] also taught that a woman's bier may not be set down, delaying her burial, out of respect for her body. The Talmud there cites the case of Miriam who was buried near where she died (Numbers 20:1).]

Ramban concludes, however, that within the non-Midrashic interpretation, the real reason Jacob had not transported her to the Cave of Machpelah was that he was ashamed before his ancestors to bury two sisters there, since marriage to two sisters was later forbidden by the Torah [Leviticus 18:18]. Since Leah was the one he married first, her marriage was permissible; it was the subsequent marriage to Rachel that would have been forbidden, and her burial could not be in the Cave of Machpelah.

[On the justification for Jacob's marriage to two sisters, see *Gur Aryeh* cited on p. 1084, *Chizkuni* and *Pesachim* 119b cited in the footnote on p. 1279 and Ramban to Deut. 18:25, cited in footnote above, p. 1519.

[See, also *comm.* to 35:19, and Rashi and *Gur Aryeh* to 30:15ff (p. 1304) that Rachel forfeited the privilege of being buried with Jacob in the Cave of Machpelah because she made light of Jacob's companionship (see *Overview* to *Vayeitzei*).

[See also Ramban to 35:16 cited in 35:19 s.v. וַתִּקְבֹּר who suggests that Jacob buried her on that very site, on the wayside, and did not bring her into nearby Bethlehem because he foresaw that Bethlehem would belong to the tribe of Judah. He wanted her body to lie in the portion of her son, Benjamin, on whose border her tomb is.]

A reminder of the site.

Oznaim L'Torah writes that in the simplest sense, Jacob specified where he buried Rachel lest Joseph had forgotten it, since he was only a child when she died. After Jacob's death there would be no one to ask. The children of Leah and of the maid-servants would not be visiting Rachel's

48 * Then Israel saw Joseph's sons and he said, "Who
8-9 are these?" * And Joseph said to his father, "They are
my sons whom God has given me here." He said,

sepulchre. Benjamin never knew his mother and would certainly not know her burial site.

8. Jacob perceives Joseph's sons.

וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר מִי
אלה — Then Israel saw Joseph's
sons and he said, 'Who are these?'

That Jacob is described here as seeing is difficult inasmuch as we are told below [v. 10] that Jacob's eyes were heavy with age and he could not see. Furthermore, his inquiring about the identity of Ephraim and Manasseh at this point is puzzling especially since he spoke about them earlier [v. 5-6] and the fact above that Ephraim regularly studied with Jacob, as *Rashi* notes in v. 1.

Commentators who advance the most simple, literal sense of Scripture (e.g. *Radak*; *Bchor Shor*; *Rashbam*; *Sforno* and others) maintain that Jacob could perceive figures but could not distinguish individuals. In this sense, Jacob is described in our verse as 'seeing' Joseph's sons, i.e., apprehending that the two people were present and asking which was which [see also *Malbim*].

Rashi follows the Midrash. He explains that Jacob wished to bless the children, but the Divine Spirit departed from him because Jacob saw [i.e., prophetically perceived (comp., 42:1)] that wicked kings would descend from Joseph's sons — Jeroboam and Ahab from Ephraim, and Jehu and his sons from Manasseh. He therefore said to Joseph, 'Who are these?' meaning: Where did these sons, who are apparently unworthy of a blessing, come from?

As the Midrash Aggadah explains, Jacob meant to ask, 'From what marriage were they born that they should be unworthy of blessing?' [Thus Jacob implied that Joseph's marriage may not have been halachically valid.]

Or *HaChaim* and *Haamek Davar* cite the Midrashic interpretation, but suggest that Jacob's desire to have his grandchildren discussed and named was to enhance the blessing he was about to confer by intensifying his love for Joseph, his favorite son, and the two grandsons. Similarly, Joseph's response — invoking God's beneficence, and Jacob's hugging and kissing the boys was calculated to bring about the same spiritual joy and ecstasy. See *comm.* to v. 10.

Or *HaChaim* adds that this is the mystical intent of *Jeremiah* 31:19: *Is Ephraim my dear son? ... for whenever I speak of him, I remember him still ... therefore My inwards are stirred for him ... I will surely have mercy on him.*

9. בְּנֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לִי אֱלֹהִים בְּוָה —
'They are my sons, whom God has given me here' [lit; by this see *Rashi* below].

Following the simple, literal intimation, Joseph was merely responding to his blind father's query: 'They are my sons whom God has given me בְּוָה, in this place' [the translation follows *Onkelos*].

According to *Ramban*, בְּוָה denotes: in line with your earlier statement. That is, they are the ones you described earlier [v. 5] as the sons who were given me by God before you came to Egypt, and whom you are considering as your own. Compare the similar connotation

ויחי מח/י-יא שני י סעיני ישראל בברו מזקן לא יוכל
 לראות ויגש אתם אליו וישק להם
 יא ויחבק להם: ויאמר ישראל אל-יוסף

of בזה in *Esther 2:13*: *In this way* (בזה), i.e., in the manner described above) the maiden would come to the king.

That Joseph was so lengthy in his response, instead of saying merely 'They are my sons,' is because the righteous are so careful to attribute all goodness to God and praise Him as the Prime Giver. Jacob had similarly introduced his sons to Esau by mentioning that they were the children whom God has graciously given your servant [33:5]. Joseph's intent, too, was one of gratitude that even in exile God graciously provided him with these fine children (*Ramban*).

[Following *Rashi's* Midrashic interpretation that Jacob inquired about the origin of the children and the legitimacy of Joseph's marriage, Joseph responded with an assurance that the children were begotten from a marriage of holiness, and worthy of being blessed (notwithstanding the fact that they — not unlike the other brothers — would be the ancestors of certain wicked descendants):]

Rashi accordingly translates בזה to mean by this, i.e., by means of this document, and interprets: Joseph showed his father his betrothal and marriage contracts [evidence that Asenath was his wife

and not a concubine; that she embraced his Jewish faith since *kid-dushin* (halachic betrothal) does not apply to gentiles. This was evidence that these offspring of the marriage were accordingly of the faith of Israel (*Mizrachi*; *Levush*; *Zikaron*). However, when Jacob still did not bless the children, Joseph perceived that the Divine Spirit was still absent.] Joseph then prayed to God and the Divine Spirit again rested upon Jacob.

Levush adds that Joseph invoked God in this connection to emphasize that his marriage to Potiphar's daughter was Providentially arranged and undertaken with utmost religious concern and sensitivity.^[1]

Pesikta Rabbasi perceives כְּנִי הֵם, they are my sons, to imply: They are as righteous as I, and worthy to be mine.

— It connotes that they were legitimate and fit to be blessed (*Sechel Tov*).

Comp. Ramban: It means, God has performed miracles for me, so much so that the king gave me this wife, and I have these children from her.

קָחֵםנָא אֵלַי וְאֶבְרַכֵּם — Bring them to me, if you please, and I will bless them.

1. The *Midrashim* add that Joseph showed Jacob the amulet engraved with HASHEM's Name that his wife, Asenath, wore around her neck since childhood. The amulet indicated that she was the daughter of Dinah, daughter of Jacob [see footnote, p. 1800].

Thus, when Joseph mentioned God in the context of his reply, he was suggesting that only direct Divine Providence could have arranged for the mother of his children to be a member of his father's family, notwithstanding some unworthy people who would descend from them. Therefore, they were worthy of the Patriarch's blessing.

At this, the Divine Spirit again rested upon Jacob and he blessed the children.

48 "Bring them to me, if you please, and I will bless 10-11 them."

¹⁰ Now Israel's eyes were heavy with age; he could not see. So he brought them near him and he kissed them and hugged them. ¹¹ Israel said to Joseph, "I

— Having thus been satisfactorily apprised of their identity, and, according to *Rashi*, the Divine Spirit having again alighted upon him.

(According to other Midrashim — e.g. *Pesikta Rabbosi*, *Midrash Aggadah* — the Divine Spirit did not return to Jacob until he again became joyous from kissing the children and Joseph specifically beseeched God's mercy).

Rashi cites an allusion to this entire episode in the prophecy of *Hoshea* [11:3]: וְאָנֹכִי תְרוּנָלְמִי לְאַפְרַיִם קָחָם עֲלֵי-יָדָיו [literally: And I (God) was familiar towards Ephraim, taking them by his arms] which *Midrash Tanchuma* homiletically renders: I made My spirit once again alight familiarly upon Jacob for Ephraim's sake, until he (Jacob) took them (Ephraim and Manasseh) upon his arms. [See also *Rashi* to *Hoshea* *ibid.*]

The translation of נָקִי, if you please, follows *Rashi's* general interpretation of the term throughout Scripture. *R' Avraham b. HaRambam* follows *Onkelos* and suggests that in this context the word means now.

וְעֵינֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּבִדּוּ מִזֶּקֶן לֹא יוֹכֵל — *Now Israel's eyes were heavy with age; he could not see.*

— I.e., he could not see well enough for his blessing to be effective, for we derive from many Scriptural passages that for one's blessing [or curse] to take effect, it is preferable for him to see whom he blesses [or curses]. See for example *Numbers* 23:13: *Come with me to another place from which you can see them*; *Deut.* 34:1: *And HASHEM showed him (Moses) the whole land prior to blessing it*; similarly of *Elisha* [*II Kings* 2:24]: *He turned around and looked at them and*

cursed them (*Sforno*; see also *Sforno* to *Numbers* 22:41).

[*Sforno* thus explains why this detail of Jacob's failing eyesight is recorded here. He knew who Manasseh and Ephraim were, but there had to be personal contact for his blessing to be efficacious; since he could not see them, he was about to draw them close, to hug and kiss them in preparation for his blessing (see below).]

The Talmud [*Yoma* 28b] perceives the spiritual implication of this passage to be that Jacob's eyes had grown weak from Torah-study and the pursuit of wisdom, the connotation of נָקִי, old age being a *notarikon* [abbreviation] for נֶחֱמָה קָחָהּ, *he who has acquired wisdom*.

וַיָּבֵשׁ אֹתָם אֱלִי — [So] he [Joseph, or perhaps, Jacob] brought them [his sons] near him.

וַיִּשָּׁק לָהֶם נִיחָבֵק לָהֶם — And he [Jacob] kissed them and hugged them.

Since Jacob had experienced some difficulties, as noted, in arousing the spiritual feelings requisite for blessing them, he kissed and hugged them to arouse his love preparatory to the blessing. In this way, the blessing would be more efficacious (*Tzror HaMor*; *Sforno*).

For, as noted *ibid.*, a kiss Kabbalistically brings about deep spiritual intimacy. Furthermore, the Divine Presence alights only where there is joy; kissing his grandsons heightened Jacob's feeling of joy prior to conferring the blessing [see *comm. ibid. v. 27*].

ויחי מח'יביג ראה פניך לא פללתי והנה הראה אתי
 יב אלהים גם את-זרעך: ויוצא יוסף אתם
 יג מעם ברביו וישתחו לאפיו ארצה: וינקח
 יוסף את-שניהם את-אפרים בימינו
 משמאל ישראל ואת-מנשה בשמאלו

In so doing, Jacob emulated his father Isaac who similarly kissed him before he blessed him [27:26] (*Tur*).

11. ראה פניך לא פללתי. — *I dared not accept the thought that I would see your face.*

Preliminary to invoking the blessing, Jacob makes yet a further acknowledgment of God's beneficence in order to intensify his love and heighten the spiritual efficacy of the blessing (*Abarbanel*).

After mentioning Rachel's death, Jacob became saddened. It is known that the Divine Spirit does not rest amid sadness. That is why Jacob chose this moment to cheer himself by reflecting on God's graciousness vis-a-vis Joseph and his grandchildren (*Diurei Yirmiyah*).

The translation of לא פללתי follows *Rashi* who interprets: I never dared think that I would see your face again. לא פללתי is an expression for *thinking*; comp. the noun פלילה, *counsel*, in *Isaiah* 16:3.

Onkelos renders: קברית, *hoped*, while *Lekach Tov* interprets: *I never even prayed [התפללתי] to see your face.* I have utterly resigned myself to the thought that you were torn to pieces by wild beasts, and one never prays for

what he thinks to be non-existent. [See Rabbi Scherman's *Overview* to ArtScroll *Siddur* regarding why prayer is referred to as *tefillah*.]

Ibn Ezra [similarly *Radak*, *Ralbag*, one view in *Chizkuni*] interprets the term to denote *judgment* (cf. פלילים, *judges*, in *Deut.* 32:31). The nuance here is: I never judged in my heart that I would ever see you again.

— והנה הראה אתי אלהים גם את זרעך
And here God has shown me even your offspring!⁽¹⁾

The term גם, *even*, or *as well*, always denotes a רבוי, exegetical extension implying something additional to the simple meaning of the subject. In this case the word גם is perceived by *Meshech Chochmah* to include Joseph's grandchildren whom Jacob lived to see. For, as we learn in *Bava Basra* 121b, there is a Rabbinic tradition — without direct Biblical support — that Machir and Yair, sons of Manasseh, were born during Jacob's lifetime.

12. ויוצא יוסף אתם מעם ברביו — *Joseph then removed them from his knees.*

I.e., from the knees of his father who had been hugging them (*Sforno*).

1. [I once heard from my father שליט"א that the inner implication of Jacob's expression והנה הראה אתי, *showed me*, rather than the expected והנה הראה לי, *showed to me*, was that Jacob was displaying his gratitude to God that notwithstanding the fact that Joseph's children were born and reared in Egypt among immoral influences, they have retained their righteousness to such an extent that "God has shown אותי, me (in) your offspring as well" — i.e., I can see myself in your offspring; the chain of tradition remains unbroken. This is the greatest compliment a grandfather can pay: that his children follow in his footsteps and that he can see in them a continuity of himself.]

48 dared not accept the thought that I would see your
12-13 face, and here God has shown me even your offspring!"

¹² Joseph then removed them from his knees and he prostrated himself with his face toward the ground.

¹³ Joseph took the two of them — Ephraim with his right hand, to Israel's left, and Manasseh with his left

After Jacob kissed them, Joseph took them in order to position them — one to the right and the other to the left — so that Jacob might lay his hands on them and bless them (*Rashi*).

[*Rashi* thus explains the contextual flow of the narrative. *Ibn Ezra* maintains, however, that this detail is not in strict chronological order, and that v. 12 occurred after the blessing and sequentially follows v. 20. *Radak* and most commentators (see *Abarbanel* below) follow *Rashi's* view however.]

As noted above [see *Rashbam* v. 2], Jacob was sitting on his bed and his feet were on the ground. Thus, his grandchildren had been standing between his knees as he hugged and kissed them. We find, accordingly, that when Jacob concluded all his blessings, he gathered his feet into the bed [49:33] (*Paane'ach* -- *Raza*; cf. *Ibn Ezra*).

Abarbanel [who agrees with *Rashi* that this verse reflects the sequence of events] suggests that the boys were seated on Jacob's knees. Joseph was concerned that they were too heavy for his father so he removed them from his lap, bowed in filial obeisance, and presented them to Jacob — properly positioned for his blessing.

וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לְאִפְּיוֹ אֶרְצָה — And he prostrated himself with [lit. to] his face toward the ground.

— While he stepped backward from before his father (*Rashi*).

13. Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh.

[One traditionally blesses another by laying his hand on the person's

head, thereby concentrating the supernal blessing upon him (see *R' Bachya* cited end of v. 14). The right hand is the preferred one for the performance of *mitzvos* and, accordingly, has spiritual primacy. Therefore if both children are blessed at the same time, the right hand should be placed on the head of the older one. Joseph has the children stand so that Manasseh is opposite Jacob's right hand, but the Patriarch has other intentions.]

וַיִּקַּח יוֹסֵף אֶת-שְׁנֵיהֶם — Joseph took the two of them.

According to *Ibn Ezra*, this verse chronologically precedes v. 8 and is in the past perfect: Joseph *had taken* the two of them.

The translation follows *Rashi* and most commentators, however, who perceive this verse to be in correct chronological sequence.

אֶת-אֶפְרַיִם בְּיָמִינוּ מִשְׁמָאל יִשְׂרָאֵל — Ephraim with his right hand, to Israel's left.

If one faces another, his right hand is opposite the other's left. [Since Ephraim was the younger, Joseph positioned him on his own right side, facing Jacob's left hand] (*Rashi*).

In effect, by positioning Ephraim with his right hand [and presenting him first] Joseph was unwittingly affirming Ephraim's supremacy (*R' David Feinstein*)

ויחי
מח/יד-טו

יד מִיָּמִין יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּגֶשׁ אֵלָיו: וַיִּשְׁלַח
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יָמִינוֹ וַיָּשֶׁת עַל־רֹאשׁ
אֶפְרַיִם וְהוּא הֶצְעִיר וְאֶת־שְׂמָאלוֹ עַל־
רֹאשׁ מְנַשֶּׁה שֶׁכָּל אֶת־יָדָיו כִּי מְנַשֶּׁה
טו הַבְּכוֹר: וַיִּכְרַר אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר

— וְאֶת־מְנַשֶּׁה בְּשִׁמְאָלוֹ מִיְּמִין יִשְׂרָאֵל
And Manasseh with his left hand,
to Israel's right.

According to Midrash Aggadah, since Joseph heard Jacob mention Ephraim first — *Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine* [v. 5] — he became apprehensive that Manasseh was to be degraded from his birthright. Therefore he now presented them in a manner that emphasized Manasseh as the firstborn.

Jacob extended his right hand diagonally toward Ephraim, who was on his left side (*Akeidah*).

[Apparently, as they came closer, Jacob was able to recognize them and distinguish between them. Otherwise, as offered below, he knew by prophetic inspiration which was Ephraim.]

Jacob's reason for preferring the younger son is stated clearly in v.19 below.

He maneuvered his hands. - שָׁבַל אֶת-יָדָיו

[Other interpretations of his phrase are recorded below.]

I.e. that Jacob had to resort to this skillful crossing of his hands instead of extending his hands straight ahead was *because* Manasseh was the firstborn, but Jacob did not wish to bless him with the right hand (*Rashi*).

48 hand, to Israel's right — and he drew close to him.
 14-15 ¹⁴ But Israel extended his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head though he was the younger and his left hand on Manasseh's head. He maneuvered his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn. ¹⁵ And he blessed

Rashi does not subscribe to this view [and would accordingly interpret each of the passages: *God did not lead them ... because it was near* (see Rashi's comm. *ibid.*); *heal ... because I have sinned to You; forgive ... because we have sinned*, since although is not among the four Talmudic translations of כי listed by Rashi in his comm. to 18:15. Rather, he maintains that our phrase *modifies* rather than *negates* the previous clause and views the passage as somewhat elliptic.

Other commentators also interpret this phrase as explaining the previous clause, but perceive the continuity as follows:

שָׁבַל אֶת יָדָיו — he thus perceived through feeling with his hands *כי מְנַשֵּׁה הַבְּכוֹר*, that Manasseh was the firstborn. [That is, the nearly blind Patriarch was able, as described in the beginning of this verse, to direct his hands onto the desired grandson — though he could not see him — because he intelligently perceived through his sense of touch that the one on his right was Manasseh, the firstborn] (*Sforno*).

Daas Zekeinim interprets: שָׁבַל אֶת יָדָיו — Jacob intelligently deduced from his [i.e. Joseph's] hands, *כי מְנַשֵּׁה הַבְּכוֹר*, that Manasseh was the firstborn. That is, since Joseph positioned one son opposite Jacob's right, Jacob realized that Joseph wanted him to receive the blessing of the right hand. Consequently, Jacob understood that Manasseh was the firstborn; nevertheless he placed his right hand on Ephraim's head. [Cf. *Or HaChaim*].⁽¹⁾

— He directed his hands with wisdom, and for this reason he merely crossed his hands because he did not want to slight Manasseh who was the firstborn by physically moving him to

the left. Had Jacob not felt that as first-born Manasseh merited some honor, he would have repositioned them instead of maneuvering his hands (*Chizkuni*).

Malbim maintains that the wisdom of this 'crossing of the hands' was further demonstrated by the fact that Jacob first laid his right hand on Ephraim and then his left on Manasseh; his left hand was therefore above his right, to show that he was aware that Manasseh was the firstborn.

R' Bachya continues that, "The blessing was effected by this laying of the hands [סְמִיכָה] as occurred when Moses laid his hands on Joshua [Numbers 27:23] so that the Divine Spirit should be imparted to him. This was also the manner of the *Semichah* — laying of the hands for ordination in the time of the Talmudic Sages — and of the raising of the hands by the *Kohanim* for the priestly benedictions. It is impossible for the *Kohen* to actually lay his hands upon each Israelite; he therefore raises his hands high in order to impart the blessing below from the source of all blessing above. This is the intent of שָׁבַל אֶת יָדָיו, he maneuvered his hands, for he intended, by means of his ten fingers, to draw the blessings from their source of Wisdom and Intelligence ... Ponder this."

15. וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶת-יוֹסֵף — And he blessed Joseph.

We do not find, however, in these verses a blessing directed to Joseph

1. *R' Joseph Breuer זצ"ל* would frequently cite the *Ksav Sofer's* understanding of Jacob's intention. Manasseh was the man of affairs who assisted Joseph in governing Egypt while Ephraim was the scholar who devoted himself totally to the study of Torah. By conferring the

הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלְכוּ אֲבֹתַי לִפְנֵי
אֲבֹרָהֶם וַיִּצְחָק הָאֱלֹהִים הָרַעָה אֹתִי
טו מְעוּדֵי עַד-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: הַמְלֵאךְ הַגָּאֵל
אֹתִי מִכָּל-רָע יִבְרָךְ אֶת-הַנְּעָרִים וַיִּקְרָא

ויחי
מח/טז

personally; the blessing in v. 16 is directed to his children.

Ramban resolves this difficulty. By blessing Joseph's children, Jacob was, in effect, blessing Joseph. These were Joseph's only children, and his entire blessing was concentrated upon them. Even if he did have other children, they would be included in the blessing of these two.

This follows the *Zohar*: "The blessing of a man's sons is his own blessing." [*Rashbam* and *Radak* interpret similarly.]

[That Jacob addressed the blessing toward Joseph rather than toward Manasseh and Ephraim directly is apparent from the third-person phraseology in the next verse '... bless the lads' rather than '... bless you.' By conferring a blessing that Joseph's progeny will be such that his ancestors would be proud to be associated with them (see *comm.* below to שמִי וַיִּקְרָא בָהֶם שְׁמִי), the blessing was on Joseph, the father of such children.]

According to *Sforno*, Jacob *did* bless Joseph as this phrase relates, but the blessing itself is not recorded. This *unrecorded* blessing is now followed with one for the children. [Or *HaChaim* interprets similarly and adds that in

Joseph's case Jacob did not require the preparatory spiritual stimulation of hugging and kissing.]

הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלְכוּ אֲבֹתַי לִפְנֵי
אֲבֹרָהֶם וַיִּצְחָק — O God before
Whom my forefathers Abraham
and Isaac walked. ⁽¹⁾

— I.e. Whom my forefathers Abraham and Isaac served in heart and deed (*Radak*).

[As explained in the *comm.* to 24:40, the expression figuratively refers to one whose righteousness is so strong that he can 'walk before Him,' that is, alone and unsupported. Comp. 6:9.]

As *Rashi* writes in his *comm.* to a parallel expression in 17:1, the phrase is to be understood as *Targum* renders it: before Whom my fathers worshipped (פָּלְחוּ) — i.e., to Whose service they cleaved. [This avoids the anthropomorphic connotation of 'walking' in relation to God (*Levush* *ibid.*).]

Comp. *Ramban* *ibid.* who interprets that the connotation of 'walking before God' is: To follow His ways, to fear Him alone, and to do whatever He commands.

According to *Sforno*, the implication of Jacob's invocation is that God should act in the merit of his forefathers

main blessing on Ephraim, Jacob wished to demonstrate for all time that Israel reserves its highest regard for the Torah scholar, no matter what the qualifications of any others [see footnote further, v. 19].

1. The Midrash offers two figurative illustrations of our forefathers 'walking before God': R' Yochanan said: It was like a shepherd standing and watching his flock [i.e., our forefathers were like sheep preceding their Shepherd who cared for them, since all depend on God's sustenance]; Resh Lakish said: Like a prince who walks and elders precede him [in an entourage heralding, as it were, his arrival and presence; so did the Patriarchs, God's 'chariot,' herald His Presence on Earth]. The Midrash concludes that R' Yochanan's view demonstrates how we need His honor [i.e., how we rely on His Providential care] while Resh Lakish's view emphasizes how He requires us to glorify him [that is, since He created all for His honor (*Isaiah* 43:7) He demands that His creatures pay Him due honor (*Yafeh Toar* ch. 30)].

48 Joseph saying, "O God before Whom my forefathers
16 Abraham and Isaac walked – God Who shepherds me
 from my inception until this day: ¹⁶ May the angel who
 redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my

Abraham and Isaac who walked before Him.

[On the propriety of Jacob's referring to his father by name, see footnote to 49:31.]

Jacob did not include himself with his forefathers, although he also 'walked before God,' because he did not want to consider himself in their category of absolute righteousness (*Radak*; *Kli Yakar*).

The translation of אלהים as O God – i.e. You, O God – the ה being a הַקְרִיָּא, *interjectional particle* (as in the exclamation הַמֶּלֶךְ הַקָּדוֹשׁ), rather than a הַדְרִיָּא, *definite article*, follows *Sforno* who perceives this passage as introductory to the following verse.

הָאֱלֹהִים הָרָעָה אֹתִי מֵעוֹרֵי עֲדָהֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה – God Who shepherds me from my inception until this day.⁽¹⁾

Who shepherds me like a shepherd. That is, who graciously sustained me from the moment I breathed my first breath unto this very day (*Radak*; comp. *Onkelos*).

Jacob introduced his blessing by invoking the love of the ancients [i.e., his forebears, Abraham and Isaac] just as we do in our daily *Shemoneh Esrei* prayers, beginning first with the remembrance of the Patriarchs. He then modestly added his own merit by mentioning God Who shepherded him, thereby implying that he had followed in God's path like a sheep following its shepherd. When he finished invoking the merit of the ancestors, he began the prayer recorded in the following verse (*Or HaChaim*).

According to *Ramban*, the word רועה, shepherd, in this context might be connected with the word רֵעַ, friend, Kabbalistically denoting the attribute of peace and friendship. [The passage would thus be translated: *The God Who manifested His attribute of Friendship to me ...*]

הַמֶּלֶךְ הַגָּדֹל אֹתִי מִכָּל רָע יְבָרֵךְ – אֶת הַנְּעָרִים – May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads.

[This is the essence of the prayer Jacob began with the previous verse: May You, O God, cause Your 'emissary' – the angel whom You always dispatched to redeem me from all evil – to bless the lads, etc. The prayer-blessing in this verse was certainly not addressed to the angel himself, who clearly has no power to act except as an agent of the Holy One, Blessed is He [see *Rashi* to 18:10]; it was directed to the One Who dispatches the angel, and to Whom Jacob referred in the introductory invocation in the previous verse. The syntax of this translation follows *R' Avraham ben HaRambam* and avoids many difficulties encountered by other translations.

Comp. also *Targum Yonasan*: 'God before Whom ... God Who sustained me ... May it be pleasing to You that the angel whom You assigned to me to redeem me from all evil shall bless the lads.'

God performs His will through angels whom He dispatches to act as

1. The *gematria* [numerical equivalent] of the letters of the word מֵעוֹרֵי, from my inception, equals 130 – Jacob's years before he came to Egypt; עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, until this day: the *gematria* of הַיּוֹם, this equals 17 – all the years Jacob was in Egypt (*Kedushas Levi*).

guardians of His loyal, righteous servants, and to benefit them, as it is written [Psalms 34:8]: *The angel of HASHEM encamps round those who fear Him, and he delivers them* (Radak).

As Rashi notes, the expression refers to: The angel whom God usually dispatches to help me in my distress. [— May God grant him the authority to *bless the lads* (Radak).] This is similar to 21:11-12: *The angel of God said to me in a dream ... I am the God of Bethel* [where the connotation is *I am the emissary of the God of Bethel*. See *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:27].¹¹

Who redeems me from all evil. — On every occasion of misfortune (Rashi, see above);

— From the hands of Laban and in the incident of Shechem [ch. 34] (Radak);

— Who saved me from being assigned an evil wife, of whom it is written that she is more bitter than death. As a result my progeny are all perfect (Zohar).

The present tense *הואל*, *who redeems*, is poignant. For Jacob, Divine Providence is present eternally, always near to man, always merciful ... God's love is inexhaustible; it knows neither past nor future — only the present (R' Munk to 35:3).

וְיָבֹרֵךְ אֶת-הַנְּעָרִים — *Bless the lads.*

— Manasseh and Ephraim (Rashi).

[Why Rashi found it necessary to make this comment is unclear, inasmuch as it is self-evident from the context that Manasseh and Ephraim are the subjects. The commentators on Rashi struggle with this problem.]

Rosh appears to suggest that this first blessing was directed primarily to Joseph, rather than to his sons who were not mentioned until v. 20. Consequently, in his blessing to Joseph himself, Jacob did not tamper with the order of his children's birth; and Rashi alludes to this by mentioning Manasseh first. Later, when Jacob turned his attention to the children, he named Ephraim before Manasseh.

Perhaps by emphasizing Manasseh and Ephraim's names, Rashi implies that it was Jacob's intention that the children merit the blessing not only because they were sons of Joseph but in their own individual merit — as Manasseh and Ephraim. By their own achievements they will earn the privilege of having their forefathers' names invoked, as people will proudly point and say: These are descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! Comp. the converse case of Ishmael who was worthy of being blessed only by virtue of the fact that he was Abraham's offspring [21:13: *וְיָבֹרֵךְ הוּא*] (R' David Feinstein).

— Just as this angel had always been dispatched to redeem me, so may he be given the mission to *bless the lads* (Radak).

Sforno perceives the connotation: O God, even if [as Rashi records in v. 8, Jacob originally feared] they are not worthy of Your personal blessing, at least bless them through an intermediary — *command the angel who always redeems me to bless the lads*.

וְיִקְרָא בָּהֶם שְׁמִי וְשֵׁם אֲבֹתִי אֲבָרְהָם וְיִצְחָק — *And may my name be declared upon* [lit. in] *them, and the*

1. The Talmud [Pesachim 118a] observes that man's sustenance is more difficult [other versions: greater] to achieve than the redemption. Of redemption it is written: The angel who redeems me from all evil — a mere angel. Of sustenance, however, it is written God Who sustained [lit. *shepherded*] me. [Comp. versions in Midrash Tehillim 80:2; 89:2; Bereishis Rabbah 97; Pesikta Rabbasi 33.]

48 name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they prolif-

names of my forefathers Abraham and Isaac. ⁽¹⁾

May they constantly strive to such heights that they will be worthy of having their names coupled with those of their ancestors, the Patriarchs. We find that whenever the Jews strayed they were identified not with their forefathers, but with those whose evil ways they emulated, as it is written [Isaiah 1:10]: *Hear the word of HASHEM, O rulers of Sodom* [i.e. Jewish rulers who conduct themselves like Sodomites (Rashi; Radak ad loc.)] (R' Avraham ben HaRambam citing his grandfather R' Maimon).

It is in this general vein that Jacob mentioned himself before his fathers — first 'my name' and then the name of my forefathers Abraham and Isaac. It is as if he were implying: May my progeny be so righteous that not only I will proudly associate my name with them, but even my more illustrious forefathers will be proud of them and want to associate their names with them. Or in another sense, May they act so righteously that all will couple their names not only with mine, but with my illustrious forebears as well (R' David Feinstein).

B'chor Shor interprets: May it be evident from their deeds and behavior that they are my progeny and the progeny of my forefathers.

For the Holy One, Blessed is He, blessed our progeny, and when they are prolific and blessed, the world will say of them, 'These are certainly the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob whom God has blessed,' as it is written [Isaiah 61:9]: *And their progeny shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all that see them shall acknowledge them that they are the progeny which HASHEM has blessed.*

Ibn Ezra [in the version available to Ramban; see *Karnei Or*] interprets that the phrase means that the entire Jewish nation will be called by the name Ephraim [see, for example, *Jeremiah* 31:19] just as they are referred to as the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Ramban disagrees, noting that Jacob said 'upon them,' referring to both Manasseh and Ephraim, whereas we never find the people of Israel called Manasseh! However, Ibn Ezra's comment may be defended since *Zechariah* 10:6 refers to all Israel as *the house*, a designation that includes both Manasseh and Ephraim. The more probable meaning of the blessing, Ramban maintains, is that their line should exist forever, and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob be recalled in them forever.

... And the names of my forefathers Abraham and Isaac — but not Terach or Nachor, because righteous men are not called by their father's names if the latter are wicked, nor *vice versa*, as in the Talmudic dictum [*Sanhedrin* 52a]: 'A wicked man is called by his wicked ancestor even if he is the son of a

1. Many Mussar writers perceive in this passage an intimation that the true blessing will come when Israelites retain their Hebrew names. They homiletically interpret the verse as follows: Let them be called by my name and the names of my forefathers Abraham and Isaac — and let them not be called by foreign names; and then they will merit multiplying like fish within the land.

Indeed, *Mechilta Bo* [Pis'cha 85] cites our verse in support of the Rabbinic tradition that one of the reasons the Israelites merited redemption from Egypt was because they retained their Hebrew names.

ויחי שלישי יו וידגו לרב בקרב הארץ: וירא יוסף כי משחית אביו ידמינו על ראש אפרים

righteous man,' that is, a wicked man should not be associated with his righteous father but rather with one of his wicked ancestors. Thus, this blessing was a prayer that they might be righteous and worthy enough to be associated with the memories of Abraham and Isaac. [For though everything is in the hands of Heaven except whether an individual will fear Heaven (*Berachos* 33b), Jacob prayed that God should assist his grandsons to conquer their evil inclinations, as the Sages proclaimed (*Sucah* 52a): 'Were it not for God's help, one would never be able to conquer' (his inclination)]. David prayed similarly [*Psalms* 86:11], *Unify my heart to fear Your Name (Sforno)*.

We find conversely that when Jacob prophetically perceived that some of his descendants were conducting themselves sinfully, he exclaimed [49:6]: *Into their conspiracy, may my soul not enter! With their congregation do not join, O my honor!* [i.e. let me not be associated with those evildoers]. We accordingly find in both the cases of Zimri and Korach — to whom, as noted in the footnote to 49:6, these disclaimers refer — that when the Torah traces their genealogies, it does not mention Jacob among their ancestors, thus not associating them with Jacob, whose name would have been tarnished by their actions.

Haamek Davar comments that the invocation of the three Patriarchs was intended to invoke God's blessing in three areas: military security, livelihood, and internal peace and harmony.

1. The phrase *within the land* is taken to imply that this great fruitfulness will occur specifically in *Eretz Yisrael* — when they settle the Land *par excellence* — not before. For in the census counts taken in the Wilderness, we do not find that the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim were more numerous than the others. By the time they arrived in *Eretz Yisrael*, however, the sons of Joseph had become numerous and they required large tracts of land. But since the land was apportioned according to the number of people who lived at the time of the Exodus, the portions allotted were too small for the newly populous tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim.

And so, as the Talmud *Bava Basra* 118a records, Joseph's descendants complained to Joshua [Joshua 17:14]: 'Why have you assigned as our portion a single allotment and a single district, seeing that we are a numerous people whom HASHEM has blessed so greatly?' [So greatly ...

[On the propriety of Jacob mentioning his father by name see footnote to 49:31.]

And may they multiply like fish within the land.

Like fish — which are fruitful and which multiply, and which the Evil Eye cannot affect [since fish live in an element apart, in calm, and in unseen depths. Mankind, inhabitants of another element, remain unaware of this carefree aquatic existence, and so do not cast an evil eye upon them. And in any event, the Evil Eye has no effect over what is hidden from sight (see *Berachos* 20a)]. So will Joseph's descendants multiply and be unharmed by the Evil Eye (*Rashi*; see also on עין further 49:22).^[1]

As *R' Hirsch* explains in his *Sid-dur* (p. 726), just as fish enjoy a quiet but contented and cheerful life beyond the conception of human beings, so Jews who live in the sphere assigned them by God will have a degree of serenity and happiness far beyond the comprehension of those around them.

The *Gemara* *ibid.* explains that Joseph was worthy of this blessing of immunity against the Evil Eye, since 'The Evil Eye has no power over the eye which refused to feed itself on what did not belong to it' [a reference to Joseph

48 *erate abundantly like fish within the land."*

17 ¹⁷ *Joseph saw that his father was placing his right hand on Ephraim's head and it displeased him; so he*

who 'closed his eye' against the advances of Potiphar's wife.]

Onkelos renders: And like the fish of the sea may they multiply among the children of men on earth.

Abarbanel perceives the nuance to be: Although the names of Abraham and Isaac would be proclaimed upon Joseph's descendants, let them not be barren as these Patriarchs were initially, but let them multiply as prolifically on earth as fish do in the sea.

In a homiletical vein, the *Chasam Sofer* once remarked that the survival of the Jews is as unnatural as our verse's

depiction of fish flourishing within the land.

The literal translation of ויִרְגוּ [a verb derived from the noun דג, fish] as *may they multiply like fish* follows *Rashi*.

Similarly, *Rashi* in *Yoma* 75a comments that רָגָה refers to procreation. Comp. also *Menachem*, *shores* רָג, but cf. *Donash* who maintains that even in its meaning of procreation the word essentially denotes fish. See also *R' Avraham ben HaRambam* and *R' Shmuel ben Chofni*.

וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף כִּי־נִשֵּׂית אָבִיו יָד
וְיָמִינוּ עַל־רֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם — *Joseph saw that his father was placing [or: was about to place (see footnote)] his right hand on Ephraim's head.*⁽¹⁾

כָּה, lit. *until now* — our members have increased dramatically in the short period from our arrival in *Eretz Yisrael*, עַד כָּה, *until now* (*Vilna Gaon*).]

Joshua was concerned that by speaking so openly about their numbers, they were inviting the Evil Eye. He therefore gave them the advice in the following verse [*ibid.* v. 15]: 'If you are such a numerous people, go up to the forest country ...' His intention was, 'Go and hide in the wooded areas so you will be shielded from the Evil Eye.' But they refused his suggestion pointing out, 'We are descendants of Joseph over whom the Evil Eye has no power.'

Or HaChaim observes that in this regard the children of Joseph are superior to fish in their immunity against the Evil Eye. Fish enjoy their immunity because, as noted, they are covered by waters; Joseph's descendants will be protected against the Evil Eye even when they are בְּתוֹכָם, in the midst of the land.

The commentators to *Numbers* 26:54 explain that many children had been born to Ephraim and Manasseh in the years shortly before the division of the land. Since they were not yet twenty years old when the land was divided, they were not eligible to receive plots in *Eretz Yisrael*, but within a few years they would be landless adults. This was the reason for the complaint to *Joshua*, not that they received less than they were entitled to according to the laws regulating distribution of *Eretz Yisrael*. *Joshua's* response was that they should conquer land in their own portion that was still occupied by the indigenous Canaanites.

1. The Torah does not always necessarily record events in the exact sequence they occurred [אין מוקדם וקאוחר בחורף]. There is a difference of opinion among the commentators as to when the incident in this verse took place.

The most common interpretation is that the verses reflect the true chronological sequence, and the attempted removal of Jacob's hand occurred between the blessings of v. 5. 15-16 and v. 20.

Radak records the possibility that this occurred even before Jacob began the first blessing, but he favors the view that it occurred after Jacob completed the first blessing, and the Scriptural narrative is in chronological order.

R' Avraham ben HaRambam maintains that this verse reverts to describe what had occurred after v. 14 when Jacob was about to utter the blessing in v. 15. After relating how Jacob crossed his hands, the Torah records the beginning of blessing, and then reverts to relate what had occurred in the interim. According to this interpretation our passage would be rendered in past perfect: 'Now when Joseph had seen that his father was about to place [נִשֵּׂית; thus having a future connotation] his right hand on Ephraim's head.' (*Rashbam* also appears to follow this view.)

וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּתְמַךְ יָד־אָבִיו לְהִסִּיר
אֹתָהּ מֵעַל רֹאשׁ־אֶפְרַיִם עַל־רֹאשׁ
יָמִינוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אָבִיו לֹא־כֵן אָבִי
כִּי־זֶה הַכֹּכֵר שֵׁם יִמִּינְךָ עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ:
וַיִּמָּאֵן אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר יִדְעָתִי בְנִי יִדְעָתִי גַם־

— The right hand being more honored than the left, and more powerful (*Ibn Ezra*; see verses 13 and 14).

וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינָיו — *And it displeased him* [lit. *and it was bad in his eyes*].

'Father must think I am a fool and did not position them properly,' Joseph thought, 'whereas the reverse is true: I was quite calculated in how I positioned them' (*Daas Zekeinim*).

Joseph feared that by maneuvering his hands in this manner, Jacob was unwittingly establishing a pattern for all time granting Ephraim permanent precedence [which indeed was Jacob's intention] and this displeased him (*M'leches Machsheves*).

Perhaps Joseph loved Manasseh more because he was the firstborn, and therefore Jacob's action displeased him. More probably he was concerned that his father was making an error, and if he blessed them without knowing upon which son he had placed his right hand, his blessing would be ineffective as it would be without proper Divine inspiration. When, however, Jacob said, 'I know my son, I know' [v. 19], Joseph was reassured (*Ramban*).

Minchah Belulah explains why Joseph did not react earlier to Jacob's maneuver: At first Joseph thought that Jacob crossed his hands to compensate the younger Ephraim for a lesser blessing.

However, when he saw that Jacob was blessing them equally, and that Ephraim would obtain the greater benefit of the right hand, Joseph reacted.

[*Rosh* cited above maintains that since the original blessing was directed primarily to Joseph (v. 15), he did not mind; the following blessing was to be directed to the children themselves so Joseph was concerned that the placement of the hands should reflect their true status.]

וַיִּתְמַךְ יָד־אָבִיו לְהִסִּיר אֹתָהּ מֵעַל רֹאשׁוֹ — *So he supported his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's* [i.e., in order to place it upon Manasseh's; the phrase is elliptic (*R' Meyuchas*; *Menachem Shores* *Sechel Tov*; *R' Shmuel b. Chofni*)].

That is, he lifted it from his son's head holding it up with his own hand (*Rashi*).

Rashi thereby resolves the ambiguity of the phraseology *supported ... to remove*. It emphasizes that Joseph did not disrespectfully take his father's hand from Ephraim's head and place it on Manasseh's head; were that the case the phrase would have read *וַיִּסָּר ... וַיִּתְמַךְ*, he *supported and removed ... and placed*. Rather, *Rashi* explains, Joseph thought his nearly blind father had erred. So he gently lifted up Jacob's hand and held it in his own as if to intimate thereby that his father should remove his hand from Ephraim's head and place it on Manasseh's (*Be'er Yitzchak*).

18. — *לא־כֵן אָבִי כִּי־זֶה הַכֹּכֵר* — *Not so, Father* [lit. *my father*], *for this is*

48 supported his father's hand to remove it from 18-19 Ephraim's head to Manasseh's. ¹⁸ And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, Father, for this is the firstborn; place your right hand on his head."

¹⁹ But his father refused, saying, "I know, my son, I

the firstborn.

This does not signify that Joseph told Jacob he was doing wrong, for that would have been disrespectful. What he meant was, I did not position the children, as you seem to have assumed, with the firstborn to my right and therefore to your left. Not so, Father — I placed the firstborn to my left and hence to your right, for this one is the firstborn — the one standing to your right (Rashbam).

According to Paane'ach Raza this was a politely worded question: Not so, Father? — Did I not act correctly in so positioning them? This one — to your right — is the firstborn.

שים ימין על ראשו — Place your right hand on his head.

Joseph asked Jacob to place his right hand on Manasseh's head because that hand is the conduit through which the greater degree of spiritual power is conveyed to the person being blessed. [Since Manasseh was the firstborn, Joseph felt that he, rather than Ephraim, was entitled to the more potent blessing] (Sforno). [See Pesikta cited in the footnote to next verse.]

19. וַיִּקְטָן אָבִיו — But his father refused.

He refused to remove his right

hand from Ephraim's head (Or HaChaim).

"The hand," Jacob said, "that — by Divine Power — repelled even an angel, you seek to thrust away!" (Midrash as explained by comm.).

[See the Zohar's comment on the same expression וַיִּקְטָן יִאָמֶר cited in the comm. to 39:8.]

וַיֵּדָע כִּי יִנְעָמִי — I know, my son, I know.

— That he is the firstborn (Rashi).

Thus, according to Rashi, this phrase forms Jacob's reply to Joseph's statement that Manasseh is the firstborn. The phrase should not be read in conjunction with the following phrase as if the entire passage means I know, my son, I know, that he too will become a people (Mizrachi).

The phrase literally reads in past tense: I have known my son, I have known; it implies: I have always known and I am fully aware (Alshich).

The repetition of the phrase is for emphasis (Mizrachi).

According to Rashbam: I did not err. I know that you are wise and that you positioned them correctly with the firstborn to your left, assuming that I would naturally place my right hand on the firstborn. However I acted intentionally in placing my right hand on the younger one.¹¹

1. According to the Midrash, Jacob was somewhat taken aback by the suggestion implicit in Joseph's words that he had been unaware which of Joseph's sons was the firstborn. His dual response I know my son, I know, intimated a knowledge of many incidents: 'I know [by Prophetic inspiration] about the incidents of Reuben and Bilhah, and of Judah and Tamar [i.e., I knew about their motives during these incidents (Yafeh Toar)]. If things unrevealed to you were revealed to me, how much more the things revealed to you! [I.e. and you thought I did not know which of your sons is the firstborn! (see Tiferes Zion).]

According to the Pesikta, the contextual flow is that Joseph feared that Jacob was unaware

הוא יהיה-לעם וגם-הוא יגדל ואולם
אחיו הקטן יגדל ממנו ורעו יהיה מלא-

ויחי
מח/ט

He, too, will become a people, and he, too, will become great.

I perceive that he [Manasseh] too will become a great people and he too will become great (*Targum Yonasan*).

The phrase is elliptic and intimates: *לעם רב*, a large nation (*R' Avraham b. HaRambam*).

He too will become a people — i.e. his offspring will be numerous enough to be termed a 'people,' and he, too, will become great — qualitatively (*Radak*).

And he too will become great, for from him will descend Gideon through whom God will perform a miracle (*Rashi from Tanchuma*).

ואולם אחיו הקטן יגדל ממנו — Yet his younger brother shall become greater than he.

Ephraim's descendant will be Joshua who will lead Israel into the Promised Land and teach them. Torah (*Rashi from Tanchuma*).

In saying that Ephraim would be greater than Manasseh, Jacob meant superiority in prestige and spiritual greatness. He could not have meant numerical superiority because the tribe of Manasseh was 60% larger than Ephraim when Israel entered

Eretz Yisrael (see *Numbers 26:34, 37*). In the spiritual sense, however, Ephraim was preeminent because Joshua, the leader of Israel, and Jeroboam, the first king of the Ten Tribes, were Ephraimites. Similarly, when the Tabernacle was inaugurated, Ephraim's offering came before Manasseh's (*Numbers 7:45, 54*), and when the tribes were divided into formations, Manasseh was assigned to the camp led by Ephraim (*Numbers 2:18, 20*). Because of Ephraim's pre-eminence we find (*Isaiah 11:13*) that the entire kingdom of the Ten Tribes was called Ephraim (*Radak*).

Cause, not result.

Haamek Davar maintains that Ephraim's pre-eminence was not the result of Jacob's blessing; to the contrary, it was because Ephraim was destined for more greatness that Jacob blessed him. Jacob explained that since Ephraim would be greater, he required a more intensive blessing. Whoever plays a more prominent role needs more of a blessing so that he can carry out his mission successfully.^[1]

ורעו יהיה מלא-הגוים — And his offspring[*'s fame*] will fill the nations.

In its literal sense the expression

of the grave consequences that result from favoritism. He therefore tried to see that his father put his more important hand on the firstborn's head so as to avoid jealousy.

When Jacob said "I know my son, I know," he meant: I am fully aware: I know which of them is the firstborn, and I also know of your sale by your jealous brothers. Nevertheless, I perceive more greatness emanating from the younger Ephraim, and it is upon him that I bestow the primary blessing. Having thus been reassured that his father was acting with full purpose and direction, Joseph acquiesced.

1. Ephraim's pre-eminence; Torah prominence takes priority over worldliness.

In our verse, Jacob states the reason for preferring the younger grandson, and attributes the pre-eminence of the younger brother to his future destiny and not to the effect of his blessing.

One may, however, safely assume that this distinction was earned. For seventeen years Ephraim devoted himself to sacred studies with his grandfather [see *Rashi* to v. 1], while Manasseh, the supervisor in Joseph's palace, was involved in temporal matters [according to

48 know; he too will become a people, and he too will
19 become great; yet his younger brother shall become
greater than he, and his offspring[*'s fame*] will fill the

filling of the nations is somewhat ambiguous. Rashi [following *Avodah Zarah* 25a] explains that it alludes to the fame of his descendant Joshua. The whole world will be filled with Joshua's fame and awesome renown when he will make the sun stand still at Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Ajilon [see *Joshua* 10:22ff and Rashi to *Avodah Zarah* 25a s.v. *וַיִּכָּא רַמְיֹאן*].

Other interpretations of the phrase are:

Ibn Ezra: Many nations will descend from him. [i.e., the word *קלא*, fullness, connotes abundance, the phrase meaning: And his seed will become the abundance of the nations (*Neter*; *Karnei Or*).]

R' Avraham b. HaRambam somewhat similarly: The expression denotes abundant profligacy to a point that they will have to inhabit lands of other nations. It is an allusion to Ephraim's expansive territory.

Radak: This refers to the Exile when the lands of others will be filled with his scattered descendants. [See *Ibn Ezra* to

Numbers 22:18 s.v. *מלא בִּירוֹ*.] See also *Hoshea* 7:8: Ephraim shall be mingled among the nations.

What kind of blessing was this prediction that one day his descendants – the Ten Tribes – would be scattered among the nations?

R' Munk explains: while it is true that the dispersion was caused by the unfaithfulness and sinfulness of Ephraim's descendants (*Hoshea* 7:8ff), Jacob's blessing was not in vain for 'they will return to God' and will have their share in the world to come (*Sanhedrin* 110b). And R' Eliezer adds: 'Even the darkness in which the Ten Tribes were lost will one day become as radiant as the day' [according to the version of *Avos d'Rabbi Nosson* 36]. And in the perspective of history, did not these exiled children of the Patriarchs enlighten the nations among whom they were scattered? They did so by teaching their conquerors the fundamental ideals of the knowledge and love of God, ideals they had never forsaken. Hence they too have a messianic vocation and their Messiah, the *מָשִׁיחַ בֶּן יוֹסֵף* *Messiah son of Joseph* [*Succah* 52a], also called *מָשִׁיחַ בֶּן אֶפְרַיִם*, *Messiah son of Ephraim* (*Targum Yonasan* on *Exodus* 40:11), will play an essential role in humanity's redemption, for he will be the precursor of *מָשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד*, the *Messiah son of David*. It is therefore not surprising to find that the prophet Jeremiah [3:12] speaks af-

Rashi in 42:23 Manasseh was Joseph's interpreter]. In this contrast between the brothers, Jacob saw a repetition of other historical phenomena when the moral and spiritual calling was better safeguarded by a younger brother than by an elder. [R' Hirsch points to Abel's spiritual superiority over Cain; Shem's over his probably older brothers; Isaac's over Ishmael; Jacob's over Esau; Joseph's over Reuben.]

And so Jacob acted accordingly, with his thoughts on the future of the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh which he had just glimpsed in his prophetic vision. His benediction was accordingly aimed at assuring his grandsons *אֲבוֹת זְכוּת*, the merit of the Patriarchs, and Divine protection.

Essentially then, we find that despite the privileges due the firstborn, Ephraim earned primacy because of his Torah study.

Thus, *Haamek Davar* observes, the Torah teaches us that Torah prominence takes priority over worldliness. This is an essential component of *כְּבוֹד הַחוּרָה*, honor due to the Torah, and the preservation of Israel's spiritual mission. This is not comparable with the case of Zebulun and Issachar where Zebulun, who engaged in commerce, is mentioned before Issachar, who devoted his life to Torah study [see 49:13]. In their case, Issachar's spiritual accomplishments were made possible only by virtue of Zebulun's support, while Ephraim received no help from Manasseh; Ephraim therefore deserved pre-eminence. And such is the rule in every generation.

ויחי
מח/כ

כ הגוים: ויברכם ביום ההוא לאמור בך
יברך ישראל לאמר ישמך אלהים
באפרים וכמנשה וישם את אפרים

fectionately of Ephraim. In this light, Jacob's words, *his offspring's fame will fill the nations*, assume the significance of a blessing.

Onkelos: His descendants will become rulers of nations. [Exactly how *Onkelos* derives this interpretation is unclear. See *Nesinah LaGer*; *Nefesh HaGer* and note to *Torah Sheleimah* #120. *Lekach Tov* explains that קל in certain contexts means *defeat* (see *Psalm* 118:10 אָמִילִם) hence our passage alludes to Joshua who defeated thirty-one kings: *His descendant shall be the conqueror of the nations*.

20. ויברכם ביום ההוא — So he blessed them that day.

He gave them an additional blessing that day (*Radak*).

— On that same day that Joseph brought them to him (*R' Avraham ben HaRambam*).

— On the very same day that he conferred the first blessings, he conferred the following blessing (*Sechel Tov*).

He blessed them on that day — i.e., according to what they deserved on that day. Although Jacob knew that some of their descendants would be infamous villains, he also knew that Ephraim and Manasseh themselves in that order, were virtuous and deservant of the blessing (*Kessef Nivchar*; *Meam Loez*).

According to *Ramban* the connotation is that on the very same day that Joseph had urged Jacob to place his right hand on Manasseh's head, Jacob insistently kept his right hand on Ephraim's head and blessed them, putting Ephraim before Manasseh.

It may be inferred from *Rashi*

that the term on *that day* refers to the day, whenever it is, that Jewish parents would wish to bless their children. Whenever such days arrive, they will use the text of Jacob's blessing. *Targum Yonason* explains the reference as alluding to the day when a newborn child is circumcised. Sephardic communities have adopted the custom of pronouncing the blessing recorded below on such occasions.

In many Jewish rites, it is still customary on the eve of the Sabbath for every pious Jewish father to place his hand over the head of his son and to bless him with the formula: *May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh*.

The *Zohar* remarks that Jacob blessed Joseph's sons before his own because a man loves his grandchildren more than his own children.

לאמור — Saying.

The word is written "full," as לאמר rather than לאמר. It implies, as is so often the case, לאמר לרורות, to repeat it in coming generations; i.e., to have it "fully" affirmed (*R' Munk*).

According to *Midrash HaBiur* and *Midrash HaGadol* the 'full' spelling intimates that he blessed them with a 'full' blessing.

— By you shall Israel invoke blessing, saying.

Israel in this context is not a personal reference to Jacob, but a collective designation for his descendants, 'the children of Israel' (*Ibn Ezra*).

When one wishes to bless his sons he will bless them by invoking this blessing, and a man will say to

48 nations.”²⁰ So he blessed them that day saying, “By
20 you shall Israel invoke blessing, saying, ‘May God
make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh’” — thus he

his son: *May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh* (Rashi).

Rashi seeks to avoid the misapprehension that Jacob commanded all Jewish fathers to bless their children this way. Rather it reflects the esteem in which Ephraim and Manasseh will be held. Ephraim and Manasseh will be so prominent in people's minds, that when one wishes, of his own volition, to bless his sons he will cite Joseph's sons as the model for his children to emulate (*Gur Aryeh*).

You are so pregnant with abundant blessings, that all will acclaim: ‘By you is it proper for all Israelites to invoke blessings ...’ (*Or HaChaim; Alshich*).

§ The Hebrew word בך, *by you*, is in singular, whereas the plural בכם would be expected since Jacob was presumably addressing Ephraim and Manasseh.

Ramban explains that the phrase *by you* was addressed to Joseph, i.e., *by your children*, the meaning being that the nation of Israel will bless itself with Joseph's children and say to those being blessed, “May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.”⁽¹⁾

Thus Joseph will be the model for every father in Israel, Ephraim and Manasseh for all sons. The highest blessing that can be wished upon a person is that he may be like someone who is generally recognized as a blessed man. The happiest father is one who can serve as a model for all fathers — and that is Joseph. By blessing the sons in the father, and the father in the sons, the natural relation of father and sons is preserved. Jacob says that every family should hope for a good fortune like

Joseph's — that a father will lead his children to their grandfather for a blessing, and that the blessing should apply to both generations simultaneously. (See *Akeidah; Alshich*).

According to Radak, the singular *by you* was addressed to Ephraim; Manasseh was included secondarily.

Oznaim LaTorah perceives a deeper significance. By speaking to the brothers in the singular, Jacob was implying that the blessing would be effective only if there were unity and harmony between them.

— ושמך אלהים כאפרים ובמנשה
“May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.”

Why were Ephraim and Manasseh specifically chosen to serve as models for parents to cite in blessing their own children?

The commentators explain that Ephraim and Manasseh were the first Jews to be born and educated in the highest echelons of an exile-society who remained loyal to their religion, despite the foreign influences and daily temptations of an alien culture. They had never thought of exchanging their Judaism for high social standing or the brilliant political careers that Egypt offered them. On the contrary, they abandoned their positions in the Egyptian aristocracy to join their “foreign” relatives, who were viewed as contemptible immigrant shepherds. In so doing, they

1. In the Kabbalistic sense, the word בך is to be perceived as denoting the Twenty-two Letter Name of God, corresponding to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet with which the Torah is written [the numerical value of the letters בִּי is 22].

Israel is blessed by this Name בך, as we read [Exod. 32:13]: Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel Your servants, to whom You swore בך, *by Your own self* [i.e. by Your designation בך]. That, too, is the inner implication of [Song of Songs 1:4]: We will be glad and rejoice בך, *In You*, i.e. in the Twenty-two Letter Name by which You are designated (*Zohar; Zohar Chadash Shir HaShirim*). (For an exposition on the Twenty-two letter Name of God, see *ArtScroll Bircas Kohanim* p. 45.)

ויחי כא לפני מנשה: ויאמר ישראל אל-יוסף
 מח/כא-כב הנה אנכי מת והיה אלהים עמכם
 והשיב אתכם אל-ארץ אבותיכם:
 כב ואני נתתי לך שכם אחר על-אחיק

set the example of an upbringing based entirely on an ideal of life, based on strong direction by a father conscious of his duty. They therefore serve as perpetual models for all children to emulate in maintaining their Torah-standards throughout life.

As R' Hirsch writes in 41:50, To be the only Jew in Egypt ... and still to raise children who remain for all time the model of Jewish aspiration and blessing is an achievement worthy of emphasis.

Thus — נישם את-אפרים לפני מנשה
he put Ephraim before Manasseh.

— In this blessing thereby giving Ephraim precedence in determining the standard-bearers in the Wilderness — where Ephraim was the leader of the three-tribe group to which Manasseh was assigned — and in the inauguration offering at the dedication of the Tabernacle, when Ephraim's offering preceded Manasseh's. See *Numbers* 2:18, 20; *ibid.* 7:48; 54. [In each of these cases, the tribe of Ephraim is mentioned before Manasseh] (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).¹

Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, and Ramban interpret that the 'putting' of Ephraim before Manasseh was in specific regards to this blessing, where Ephraim is mentioned first.

— Jacob thus set the stage for the proper reverence due to Torah Sages. An Ephraim, who engages in Torah study, must precede one who devotes his life primarily to worldly pursuits (*Akeidah; Haamek Davar*. See footnote previous verse, s.v. "Ephraim's Pre-eminence").

Abarbanel maintains however that the Torah would not have mentioned this obvious fact were it only to be understood in the sense of precedence in the phraseology of the blessing. He suggests, therefore, that the phrase has a more literal connotation, depicting how Jacob physically moved Ephraim to the forefront, giving him precedence.

21. — ויאמר ישראל אל-יוסף
Then Israel said to Joseph.

Having blessed Joseph's sons and made them two tribes, Jacob once again turns to Joseph and informs him that his descendants will be heir to an additional portion of *Eretz Yisrael*, which Jacob was now bequeathing to him (*Ramban; Akeidah; Haamek Davar*).

1. R' Shmuel ben Chofni draws from the various Midrashim and lists seven areas in which we find Ephraim given priority or superiority over Manasseh:

1. In the Scriptural listing of genealogies where Ephraim is mentioned first [see *Numb.* 1:32];
2. In the territorial division of *Eretz Yisrael* [see *Joshua* 16:5; 17:1];
3. In the listing of the standards (דגלים) [see *Numbers* 2:18, 20];
4. In the order of the princely sacrifices [see *ibid.* 7:48, 54];
5. In the fact that Joshua descended from Ephraim. Although Gideon descended from Manasseh, nevertheless Joshua was the acknowledged superior [see *Judges* 8:2];
6. In the fact that the more prominent kings descended from Ephraim. Jeroboam was an Ephraimite while Jehu was a descendant of Manasseh [see verses cited by R' Shmuel b. Chofni in support of this thesis; see also *Mossad Harav Kook* ed. note #105];
7. In the blessing herein stated where Ephraim's name precedes Manasseh's.

48 put Ephraim before Manasseh.

21-22 ²¹ Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold I am about to die; God will be with you and will bring you back to the land of your fathers. ²² And as for me, I have given you Shechem — one portion more than your brothers,

הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי מוֹת — Behold I am about to die [lit. I am dying; the translation follows Radak; Targum Yonasan: My time to die has drawn near].

— And I know that God will be with you ... (Rashbam).

I.e., do not think that with my death the Divine Presence will depart from among you; even when I die God will be with you (Or HaChaim).

I am confirming my gift to you before my death (Sforno).

וְהָיָה אֵלֵיהֶם עִקָּם — [And] God will be with you.

— In your exile to save you from all travail; and you will increase and multiply greatly (Ramban).

These words were said as Jacob's death neared, and this gave them a prophetic meaning. They assured Joseph with absolute certainty that God would remain with the Jews in their exile and that He would redeem them and return them to the land of their ancestors. And so, these words became an unending source of confidence in God, strengthening and inspiring Jewry throughout the centuries of exile and hardship. Joseph repeats them almost word for word to his brothers before his own death (50:24), adding some allusions Jacob had taught him regarding the signs that will herald the redemption [וְסִמְנֵי גְאֻלָּה]. And, as Rashi points out [Deut. 33:28], Moses' last words, too, refer to Jacob's deathbed promise of deliverance for the Jewish people (R' Munk).

וְהָיָה אֵתְכֶם אֶלְאָרְץ אֲבִיכֶם — And

[He] will bring you back to the land of your fathers.

— After the four hundred years foretold to Abraham [15:13-16] (Rashbam).

... To inherit it (Ramban).

Joseph was careful to mention that the land was of the fathers. For it was to the Patriarchs, and not to those who would leave Egypt, that God had bequeathed the land. Therefore, Jacob had the legal right to grant Joseph an additional portion in it; this is what he meant by saying, And as for me, I have given to you ... (Or HaChaim).

וְאָנֹכִי נֹתֵתִי לְךָ שֶׁכֶם אַחֵר עַל־אֲחֵיךָ. — And as for me, I have given you [in that land of your fathers (Rashbam)] Shechem — one portion more than your brothers.

□ I.e., since you are undertaking responsibility for my burial, in return I have bequeathed to you [already, so it does not interfere with the blessing that I will soon bestow on my other children (Maharshal)] an inheritance for your burial — Shechem. (Cf. Joshua 24:32: And Joseph's bones, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, they buried in Shechem.) The word shechem means literally the city of Shechem: I give you the city of Shechem as your own portion beyond that of your brothers (Rashi).¹¹

1. The choice of Shechem for this gift is noteworthy.

First, as pointed out by Maharzu, in his commentary to the Midrash, Jacob had once purchased from Chamor the parcel of land around Shechem where he pitched his tent [see 33:19]. It was legally his to dispose of as he saw fit, and he now bequeathed it to Joseph. That

ויחי אֶשֶׁר לָקַחְתִּי מִיַּד הָאֱמֹרִי בְּחֶרֶפִּי בְּקֶשְׁתִּי:

[The Hebrew passage literally reads: *I have given to you one 'shechem' upon your brothers*. The word *shechem* has two meanings: (a) the actual city of Shechem; and (b) a *portion* [see references cited below]. In our passage it shares both meanings. *Rashi* initially follows the Midrash that it means the city of Shechem, citing support from the verse in *Joshua* that Joseph's remains were eventually buried in Shechem. However, that interpretation leaves the word *אֶחָד*, *one*, unexplained. *Rashi* [see below] therefore weaves in the second meaning of *portion* intimating that Shechem will be the *one portion* that Joseph will receive in addition to the portion he will receive in conjunction with his brothers. Our translation attempts to capture this dual connotation.]

Comp. *Targum Yonasan*: "Behold I have given to you the city of Shechem, one portion, for a gift above your brothers."

□ Alternately, *Rashi* offers the other meaning of *shechem*, as *portion*:

I have given you one portion more than your brothers — this refers to the *birthright*: [having been bestowed with the rights of the firstborn] Joseph's children would receive two portions [when *Eretz Yisrael* would later be apportioned]. The word *shechem* means *portion* as in *Psalms* 21:13; *ibid.* 60:8; *Hoshea* 6:9; *Zephaniah* 3:9.

[In the most literal sense, *shechem* means *shoulder*. The figurative expres-

sion implies that Joseph was bequeathed a 'shoulder,' as it were, over his brethren.]

Ramban follows the latter interpretation, and explains Jacob's comment: 'I have already given you the one thing I could confer — namely, the double portion of the birthright by which you will become two tribes in many respects — to be yours above that of your brothers.' Jacob's intent was conciliatory and he wanted to display his love for Joseph by emphasizing that he had given him as much as he could. The only thing Jacob could confer in the land was the birthright, as he had no power to deprive any of his other sons of their due heritage, and it was to Joseph that he bequeathed it.

❖ Why was Jacob not concerned that by granting Joseph an extra portion he was provoking the jealousy of his other sons? Did he not witness the unbridled jealousy he once caused by the 'two *sela* measures of fine wool' [i.e., the tunic he had given Joseph, 37:3-4] he had once given Joseph, an act which resulted in the family's descent to Egypt?

The commentators emphasize, however, that in every family, one brother — the firstborn — is entitled to a double portion, a condition that does not in-

site became the eventual location of Joseph's tomb, and according to the Midrash, is one of the three sites in *Eretz Yisrael* whose Jewish ownership cannot be contested since the Torah itself documents their legal acquisition. (The other two places are the Cave of Machpelah, Abraham's purchase of which is precisely documented in 23:16ff, and the Temple site in Jerusalem as recorded in 1 *Chronicles* 21:25).

Second, as noted in the Midrash cited by *Ramban*, Shechem had been in effect conquered by Jacob with his 'sword' and his 'bow' when the Emorite kings gathered to make war on the family in retaliation for the destructive attack made by two of his sons; and Jacob now exercised his prerogative of bequeathing it to his beloved son.

Jacob chose this city as his gift because Joseph's heroic chastity in Potiphar's house had wiped away the degradation suffered in Shechem, where Dinah had been violated by a stranger. The family's reputation for perfect morality, blemished for the first time at Shechem, had thus been re-established due to Joseph's exemplary conduct.

Furthermore, Shechem was the place where Joseph had previously gone to look for his

48 which I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow."

herently involve favoritism. Consequently, when Reuben's forfeited birthright was transferred to Joseph, the latter was entitled to a double portion, without provoking the jealousy of the others.

Da'as Zekeinim adds that only Jacob's display of special favor to Joseph when the latter was still a child, and not obviously superior to the others, could inspire jealousy. Now that Joseph was a king, all recognized that special honor was due him. Moreover, they now perceived that Joseph's dreams had indeed been prophetic and their fulfillment was God's will, and furthermore, from a very practical viewpoint, they were beholden to Joseph, and there was no room for jealousy.

□ *Targum Yerushalmi* alternatively interprets that the one portion Jacob was giving Joseph was the special garment originally made for Adam, which had been passed on to Nimrod, and eventually came into Esau's possession (27:15) [see footnote to 25:27 (p. 1063)]. It was this garment that Jacob wore when he received the blessings, and which he acquired from his brother Esau 'not with my sword nor with my bow, but through my righteousness and my good works' [see *BaMidbar Rabbah* 4:6; *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*

24; and *Rashi* below who interprets these as spiritual weapons].

This garment, originally fashioned by God, had passed through various hands, as noted above. It was later used in the investiture of those firstborn who were the primary servants of God in their generations (*Bamidbar Rabbah*, 4). Hence Jacob bequeathed it to Joseph when he gave him the *extra portion* deriving from the right of the firstborn. One may assume that there is a connection between this garment and the 'fine woolen garment' that had been given to Joseph as a youth; it too is called a *ketem* (37:3), and ancient Midrashic sources identify it as one of the garments coming from Paradise. The jealousy it caused resulted in a nearly permanent split in Jacob's family and it was brought to him bloodstained as proof of Joseph's death. Now, on the eve of his death, Jacob gives it again to his dearly beloved son, thus confirming that Joseph had always been his choice, a choice Joseph had by now justified to everyone's satisfaction (*R' Munk*).

אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְתִּי מִיַּד הָעַמּוּרִי בְחַרְבִּי וּבִקְשָׁתִּי
— Which I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow.

□ [The translation follows *Rashi's* primary interpretation that the city of Shechem is the subject. He explains that this passage in which Jacob himself claims to have taken Shechem "from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow" is based on a Midrash]:

brothers and where his deportation to Egypt began to unfold [37:13]. Now, Jacob asserted his legal rights over Shechem and transferred them to Joseph, for as the Midrash notes, justice demanded that when the tribes would be redeemed in Egyptian slavery, they should bring Joseph's remains back to the place where their ancestors had sold Joseph into Egyptian slavery. [Cf. *Rashi* to *Joshua* 24:32: מִשְׁכָּם נָגְבוּהוּ לְשָׂכָם הַקּוֹרֵיחוֹ.]

In this connection, the Midrash cites the parable of thieves who stole a barrel of wine. When the owner found them, he said, 'When you have drunk the wine, kindly return the barrel to its place.' Similarly, Joseph was stolen from Shechem, and to Shechem he had to be returned.

Indeed, Shechem lord of the city, had offered it to Dinah as a gift [as the Midrash notes on the verse, 'Inflate excessively upon me the marriage settlement and gifts and I will give whatever you tell me' (34:12)]. Since Dinah's daughter Asenath had married Joseph (cf. *comm.* to 41:45), he obtained his right to Shechem as part of his wife's estate. [Cf. *Tzror HaMor*; *R' Munk*.]

— When Simeon and Levi slew the inhabitants of Shechem all the surrounding nations gathered together against them, and Jacob took up arms to do battle with them (*Rashi*).

[This Midrashic tradition has been cited in the footnote to 34:25 (p. 1490). There are several versions of it: *Ramban ibid.* v. 13 cites the version in *Midrash Vayisa'u* (see Eisenstein *Otzar Midrashim* p. 157). He explains that the Torah did not explicitly record this incident — referring to it only by the allusion in our verse — because it was a 'hidden miracle,' that is, a miracle which man could deny, attributing it not to God but to Jacob's great natural strength. (See *Ramban* to 17:1.)]

That only the *Emorite* are mentioned in this context, though they were not the only Canaanite nation to participate in this war, is because they were the most powerful nation in Canaan and hence most representative of them all (*Ibn Ezra* to 15:16 בִּיְלֵא שְׁלֹם עֵצוֹן הָאֱמֹרִי, *ibid.* and *Ramban* to our verse; see below).

The 'Emorite' from whom Jacob wrested the city of Shechem was Chamor son of Shechem. As the Midrash [to 34:2] queries: Was he an Emorite? He was a Hivvite! [as stated in 34:2; see *comm.* there]. — The Midrash answers: He was indeed an Emorite; *Hivvite* [חִוִּי] in his case is an Aramaic adjective meaning *serpentine*. It describes Shechem's serpent-like behavior in the matter of Dinah. [In its exegesis to our verse, however, the parallel Midrash reads: "Hivvite is in-

cluded within the category of *Emorite*."]'

Maharzu notes that לָקַחְתִּי, *I have taken*, might have the legal connotation of *have acquired*, i.e., *bought*, since as noted in the *comm.* to 33:19, Jacob purchased from the sons of Chamor the parcel of land where he pitched his tent. It was the one site in *Eretz Yisrael* that Jacob legally owned and could dispose of as he saw fit; it was there that Joseph was to be later buried as the Midrash points out. [See *Abarbanel*.]

□ Following *Rashi's* alternative interpretation that the subject of our verse is the *birthright*, the 'Emorite' from whom Jacob wrested this birthright is Esau, who is so called (a) because he acted like an Emorite; and (b) he used to ensnare his father by the words (אֱמֹרִי, *imrei*) of his mouth. [See *Rashi* to 25:7.]

[In consonance with the above, it is obvious that by my 'sword' and by my 'bow' must have a figurative meaning, since Jacob did not use force to wrest the birthright from the 'Emorite' Esau.] *Rashi* therefore interprets the terms to denote Jacob's *spiritual* weapons — his kind of 'sword', and his kind of 'bow', the weapons of the righteous: by my 'wisdom' [which was sharp as חֶרֶב, *a sword*] (*Mizrachi*) and my prayer [which, like a well-aimed קֶשֶׁת, *bow*, sends its messages to its 'target' on High].¹¹

Ramban, *Radak*, *Ibn Ezra* and *Rashbam* take the words *sword*

1. By my prayer and by my supplication.

Onkelos figuratively renders my sword and my bow as בְּצִלּוֹתִי וּבִקְשׁוֹתִי, *by my prayer and by my supplication*.

This is based on the *Mechilta* [Beshallah 82] and the Talmud *Bava Basra* 123a: "... Did Jacob take it with his sword and with his bow? Surely as it has already been said [*Psalms* 44:7]: For I trust not in my bow, nor can my sword save me! However, my sword means 'prayer' and my bow means 'supplication' "[i.e. spiritual weapons; prayer protects the righteous like a sword in the hand of the mighty, and vocalized differently, בִּקְשׁוֹתִי, *my bow*, reads בִּקְשׁוֹתִי, *my petition* (*R' Bachya*).]

As *Rashbam* in his *comm.* to the Talmud there explains, the reference is to the prayers which Jacob uttered on behalf of his children, and as a result of which he successfully obtained the birthright from Esau.

The connotation is that Jacob was able to accomplish more with his prayers than Esau with his sword [cf. 27:40] and Ishmael with his bow [cf. 21:20], as it says [27:22]: *The voice is the voice of Jacob ...* (*Maharsha* ad loc.).

and bow literally and interpret them to refer to the future conquest of the Land by Joshua, Joseph's descendant, as follows: *Which I* — i.e. my descendants — *will take*, the past tense being often used for the future, particularly in prophecy [...'prophetic past'; in this case, since God had promised the land to Abraham, Jacob regarded it as though it was a *fait accompli* and already conquered]; the *Emorite* is mentioned because it was the strongest of the seven nations, and

because, as *Ramban* notes, *Sichon* and *Og* were *Emorite* kings, and the *Emorite* was the first nation the Israelites battled and with whom the conquest really commenced. [See *Joshua* 10:12; *Numbers* 32:39; *Judges* 1:35].

Comp. *Amos* 2:9: *Yet I destroyed the Emorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks.*

Ramban continues that *my sword* and *my bow* indicate that the Israelites had to fight for everything they captured, as it is written [*Joshua* 11:19, see

As the commentators note, the metaphor of *sword* meaning *prayer* is similar to that in *Psalms* 149:5,6: *let the faithful exult in glory ... two-edged swords in their hands*, which is also Rabbinically interpreted as a metaphor for prayer. As noted, the Hebrew word *וּבִקְשָׁתִי* and *with my bow* is composed of the same letters as the word *וּבִקְשָׁתִי*, and my supplication. The Rabbis in the Talmud prefer this figurative interpretation (a) in consonance with the verse cited from *Psalms* 44:7; and (b) since it is nowhere explicitly mentioned in the Torah that Jacob ever resorted to actual weapons.

According to *Gur Aryeh*, the prayer of the righteous is figuratively called 'sword' since it pierces Above and Below. Prayer is like a bow because he concentrates intensely (*מְקַדְּשֵׁת*) and to the degree that he does, the prayer is more far-reaching, like an arrow whose flight depends on the pressure exerted on the bow.

[*Meshech Chochmah* notes the distinction between *צְלוּתִי*, *my prayer* and *בְּקִיעוּתִי*, *my petition*: The former refers to the structured order of prayers ordained by the Great Assembly, while the latter refers to spontaneous individual supplication. The distinction between the two is that *prayer* — i.e., the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, is a prescribed sanctified, service and as such is not rendered ineffective by lack of *kavanah* [devoted concentration]; however, *personal petition* in which one composes his own supplications, is entirely dependent on the degree of one's *kavanah*. Cf. *Taanis* 86. In this manner, *Shemoneh Esrei* is like a very sharp sword that can cause injury even if it is not wielded with great force, but private prayers are like a bow-and-arrow — their effectiveness is in direct proportion to the degree of spiritual exertion with which one 'propels' them.]

[See *Harchev Davar* on this verse].

Midrash Rabbah to our verse, however, interprets the metaphor to mean: with *pious acts* and *noble deeds* [for it was by merit of these 'weapons' wielded by Jacob that the Holy One, Blessed is He, granted Jacob the privilege of acquiring the birthright from Esau (*Yafeh Toar*).]

The commentators offer several homiletical interpretations of why *Rashi* interpreted the metaphor to mean by *my wisdom* and by *my prayer*. [Perhaps by 'wisdom' he meant the cunning by which Jacob acquired the firstborn's blessings from Isaac.] But *Maharsha* to *Bava Basra* ibid. sums up the consensus when he writes: 'We do not know why *Rashi* embarked on a different path and put aside the words of the Talmud and Midrash. The matter calls for further contemplation.'

* * *

☞ Joseph left his father, looking radiant. When the other brothers discovered that Jacob had blessed him, they became quite jealous. There were two reasons for this. First, Jacob made Joseph's two sons into two new tribes. Second, Jacob had blessed Joseph's sons, while he had not done so for any of his other grandchildren.

The other brothers said: "We can understand why Father made Joseph's sons into two additional tribes; after all Joseph is ruler of Egypt. But why did he bless Joseph's sons and not ours? Just because Joseph has high status, does that mean that Father should increase his status and at the same time give us nothing?"

Jacob replied, 'Fear God, you holy ones. I promise you that those who fear Him will lack nothing. You will lack nothing, because God watches over those who fear Him' (*Midrash; Me'am Loez*).

ויחי °רביעי א °ויקרא יַעֲקֹב אֶל-בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הֲאִסְפוּ
מט/א-ב וַאֲגִידָה לָכֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר-יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם
ב בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים: הִקְבְּצוּ וְשִׁמְעוּ בְנֵי

comm. there]: '... Not a single city made peace with the Israelites; all were taken in battle. For it was HASHEM's doing to stiffen their hearts ... so that they might be utterly wiped out.'

The first-person my sword ... my bow implies: By the help of God – Who is figuratively my 'sword' and my 'bow' [see Deut. 33:29; Psalms 18:3; II Samuel 22:3] (Ibn Ezra; Radak; Ralbag).

Ramban adds that Jacob used the first-person to imply that it was in his merit that they were victorious; not by their own power, as it is written [Psalms 44:4]: For not by their own sword did they acquire the Land, neither did their own arm save them; rather Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your countenance, because You were

favorable to them. Kabbalistically, this refers to the merit of the Patriarchs, Your right hand alluding to the merit of Abraham, Your arm to that of Isaac, and the light of Your countenance to that of Jacob.

Ramban suggests the possibility that Jacob symbolically stretched out his sword toward the land of the Emorites and shot arrows in that direction as a sign that the land would be captured by his children. The later prophets did similar things; compare Elisha's act in II Kings 13:16-17. This might be the allusion intended by the past tense which I took, for as soon as Jacob did so he regarded the Land as already taken. [Ramban elaborates on this theme in his comm. to 12:6.]

XLIX

1. Jacob blesses his children.

Blessings occupy a prominent place throughout the Torah and particularly in the book of *Genesis*. From the time Abraham was given the power to 'bless whomever he wanted' (Rashi on 12:2), the concept of blessing played an increasingly important role. That the righteous can confer a blessing is a privilege conferred by God and He provides the metaphysical force that makes the blessing efficacious ...

At this moment in Egypt, Jacob's progeny were embarking on the historic task of constituting an independent nation. Before he died, the Patriarch wished to confer upon them the Divine blessing for success in this undertaking of universal importance (R' Munk).

ויקרא יַעֲקֹב אֶל-בָּנָיו — Then [lit. and] Jacob called for [lit. to] his sons.

— I.e., he summoned them (Rashbam).

The reference here is literally to

his sons, i.e. the tribal ancestors (*Haamek Davar*). [Comp. v. 2 where *Haamek Davar* interprets that Jacob's blessing was meant for his descendants in general.]

According to a view in the *Midrash*, the inner sense of called for his sons is that Jacob invoked [God] on behalf of his sons, beseeching Him to hearken to them.

וַאֲסֹפוּ — Assemble yourselves.

— I.e. come from your various residences, and surround my bedside (*Tzror HaMor*).

Rashbam notes that the seventy souls who came to Egypt [46:27] had multiplied greatly during the seventeen years since their arrival. Hence, the term *assemble*, [which implies that a large number of people was involved]. According to *Haamek Davar*, as noted, this was a call to his sons only, the verb *אסף*, as,

49 ¹ Then Jacob called for his sons and said,
1 "Assemble yourselves and I will tell you
what will befall you in the End of Days.

assemble referring to a selective gathering of individuals for a specified purpose, rather than a general assemblage of many people.

Compare *Kli Yakar* who draws a distinction between the verb *אסף* [*assemble*] which in Hebrew denotes gathering from outdoors to the privacy of the indoors (see for example *Deut. 22:2; Judg. 19:18*), and the verb *קבץ* [*gather*] used in v. 2 which is used in reference to the assemblage of scattered people to one, not necessarily private, place. He suggests that since, as the Sages maintain [see below], Jacob initially wanted to reveal the secret of the End of Days to his children, he used the verb *האסף*, *assemble*, to intimate that they came into the privacy of his home to hear these secrets; when the spirit of prophecy left him, however, he used the term *הקבץ*, *gather*, which implies a public gathering, because since he could no longer reveal secrets to them privacy was not necessary. [See *HaKsav V'HaKabbalah*.]

Midrashically, the intimation was that Jacob was warning them against dissension, bidding them to *assemble* and *gather* together, i.e., to remain united even after his death. Only in this way could the true Redemption come about. [See Overview to *Vayigash*.]

The past had shown how much harm could come from disunity, hatred, and envy. When Jacob thought of the family's future after his death, when they would no longer have him as a unifying force, he realized the indispensable importance of unshakable family solidarity. Jewry would face many attacks in the future and its most vital defense would be an impregnable spirit of brotherhood. Jacob requested this unity — then he was ready to deliver his last will and testament (*R' Munk*).

לְבָנָיִךְ — And I will tell you.

Jacob wanted them to believe that his intention in summoning them was not to rebuke them, but to reveal the future. Since the future is hidden, everyone desires to know it (*Abarbanel*).

[See *Rashi* below.]

אָתְּ אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא אֹתְכֶם — What will befall you.

Literally, what will 'call to you' ... if there is a *call*, there must be a *Caller*; all events must be understood as messages from God. To translate the related word *מקרה*, [coincidental] *happening*, smacks of a heathen belief that history is haphazard. Nothing happens by chance; everything is designed (*R' Hirsch* to 42:4).

בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים — In the End of Days.

I.e. in the Messianic era (*Ramban* and almost all commentators).

This follows the Midrashic view that the expression *End of Days* has this meaning in *Ezekiel 38:16* where the defeat of Gog is prophesied. (See the Overview to *ArtScroll Daniel* and *ibid.* 12:13.)

Rashi — following the above Midrash — writes that: Jacob intended to reveal the *עץ*, *End*, but the Divine Presence departed from him and he began to say other things [as evidenced by Jacob's ensuing blessings, which, although prophetic, do not reveal when the epoch of the Messiah would come to be].⁽¹⁾

Presumably, Jacob desired to reveal the End of Days in order to

1. The Midrash records that the End was revealed to two men — Jacob and Daniel — but was subsequently hidden from them. Daniel was told (*Dan. 12:4*): *Obscure the matters and seal the Book*, while in Jacob's case, though he intended to reveal the End of Days to his sons, the Divine Presence left him and everything was hidden from him. Jacob therefore proceeded to speak of other things.

ויחי מטג ג יַעֲקֹב וְשָׁמְעוּ אֶל-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם: רֵאוּבֵן

comfort and encourage his children as they stood on the threshold of a long period of exile and slavery. The 'End of Days' is a concept that emphasizes the assurance that good will triumph — a concept that Jacob wanted his children to believe in during their imminent ordeal.

But, as noted in the footnote below, the Divine Presence withdrew, signifying to Jacob that knowledge of the time of the End must remain hidden. However, the Jewish people have another source of consolation, one that substitutes for precise knowledge of the timetable of Redemption. As the

footnote states in detail, the brothers assured Jacob of their absolute faith in God, making a declaration of faith in the Oneness of God and in His mission for Israel. If such a faith is truly strong, it is a better defense against hopelessness than the knowledge of when the trials will end; belief in one's cause is more important than knowledge of when he will find relief. When Jacob heard this expression of faith, he gratefully cried out, *בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם, Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever*" (R' Munk).¹¹

According to *Rashbam* and *Radak*,

1. The origin of the Shema and of the passage, בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

In a discussion about the origins of the first verses of *Shema*, the Sages [*Pesachim* 56a] record the following tradition:

When Jacob wished to reveal the End of Days to his sons, the *Shechinah* [Divine Presence] departed from him. Jacob grew frightened and mused: "Perhaps, Heaven forbid, there is someone unworthy among my children [lit. 'in my bed'], like Abraham who begot Ishmael, or like my father Isaac who begot Esau [and this is why the *Shechinah* left me when my children arrived]?"

Thereupon his sons reassured him: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אחד. Hear O Israel [i.e. our father] *HASHEM is our God, HASHEM is One!* Just as there is only One in your heart, so is there in only One in our heart."

At that moment Jacob, in relief that God's reason for denying them knowledge of the future was not because they lacked faith in Him [even to the slightest degree], exclaimed: "בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד, Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever." [See *Maharsha*.]

[*Me'am Loez* writes that although it is normally forbidden to address one's father by name, in this case it was permitted, since the name Israel denotes greatness and authority (see 32:29), and as such it was more a title than a name. It was as if they said, "Listen Master." See also footnote to v. 31 below.]

The Talmudic discussion continues: The Sages pondered, Shall we say it? [I.e. shall we include the phrase בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ, *Blessed be the name, etc.*, during our daily recitations of *Shema*? Moses our Teacher did not. [That is, Moses did not include that phrase in the chapter of the *Shema* (*Deut.* 6:4-9). If Jacob's response were said in our *Shema*, we would be inserting something not written in the Torah.] However, Jacob *did* say it. [Therefore, if we exclude it, we would be ignoring Jacob's original response to the first declaration of the *Shema*.] Accordingly the Sages established that the phrase בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ, *Blessed be the Name, etc.*, be recited silently [to make it apparent that it is not part of the *Shema* as written in the Torah but that it was uttered by Jacob (*Mishnah Berurah* 61:30 s.v. בְּחֻשָּׁא)].

Indeed, the Halachah, as codified in *Shulchan Aruch* [ibid.], is that when reciting the *Shema* throughout the year we whisper the phrase *Blessed be* etc. The only time this phrase is said aloud is on Yom Kippur. This custom is based on an alternate version of the declaration's origin. As *Tur* writes in *Hilchos Yom Kippur* 619:

It is the custom in Ashkenaz [i.e. Germany and the Eastern European countries] to recite בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד in a loud voice on Yom Kippur. Support for this is in the Midrash, *Devarim Rabbah* (*Sidrah Va'eschanan*), where it is written that when

49 ² Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Jacob 2 and listen to Israel your father.

the sense is that Jacob's expression, *what will befall you ...*, was referring to the time they would enter Eretz Yisrael. He was alluding to their wars, conquests, and territories.

Haamek Davar similarly observes that in the literal sense, the expression אחרית הימים. *End of the Days* does not necessarily refer to the Messianic Age. He cites many references in Scripture where the term is not applicable to events in the days of the Messiah. Accordingly, he postulates, that the expression refers to the *end of the particular era in which the speaker finds himself*. In Jacob's case it refers to the end of his Exile which would culminate in its entirety when his descendants achieved security under the Davidic and Solomonic monarchies. When the Prophets spoke of the *End of Days*, it was, from their vantage point, the end of the post-Destruction Exile which will culminate with the coming of the Messiah.

2. הקבצו ושמעו בני יעקב – *Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Jacob.*

– To my words of retort and chastisement (*Kli Yakar*).

Sechel Tov – following the Talmudic-Midrashic interpretation in the footnote to v. 1 – maintains that when Jacob's children realized that he would not reveal the 'End', they began to depart. Then, with the words of this verse Jacob summoned them to remain and hear his words of chastisement and blessing.

According to *Haamek Davar*, the call of v. 1 was limited to Jacob's twelve sons, while this verse was directed to all his descendants – who are called the 'sons' of Jacob just as they are called 'sons' of Israel. Since it would have been impossible for such a large group to assemble around his bed, in effect Jacob was inviting them to assemble in some spacious area and hear from the Tribal Ancestors what Jacob was about to tell them.

וְשָׁמְעוּ אֶל-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם – *And listen to Israel your father.*^[2]

I.e., to the prophecies reflecting the destiny of his descendants he

Moses ascended to heaven he heard the Ministering Angels praising God, "Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever," and Moses brought this declaration back to Israel. This may be compared to a man who stole jewelry from the royal palace [i.e., Moses 'stole' the declaration of the angels, as it were], which he gave to his wife, telling her, "Do not wear these in public, but only in the house."

Therefore, the *Midrash*, teaches, throughout the year we recite the declaration in a whisper, but on Yom Kippur when we are as pure as the Ministering Angels we recite it publicly [i.e. in a loud voice].

[Comp. also *Devarim Rabbah* 2:31, according to which "Blessed be, etc." was Moses' response at Sinai to HASHEM's exhortation: "Hear O Israel, I am HASHEM your God..." See also *Magen Avraham* 619 88.]

R' Levi in *Devarim Rabbah* 2:35 cites the view that Jacob's children reassured him of their faith by saying *Shema* as quoted above from *Pesachim* 56a. He remarks that when a Jew recites *Shema* nowadays, it is as if he says: "Hear our father Israel: your command to our ancestors is still observed by us: HASHEM is our God, HASHEM is One!"

[Interestingly, in the Aramaic *Targum Yerushalmi* to our verse, Jacob's response to his sons' recitation of the *Shema* is given as: וְהָא שְׁמָה כְּבָא מִכֶּרֶךְ לְעָלְמָא וְלְעָלְמָא עָלְמִין, 'May His Great Name be Blessed forever and ever.' This response has been preserved as the primary response in the *Kaddish* prayer. See Overview to *ArtScroll Kaddish*.]

2. *Malbim*, following *Alshich*, mentions that while writing his commentary to Scripture it became apparent to him that "wherever a verse speaks of the ten tribes in contrast with the tribe of Judah and Benjamin, which remained loyal to the Davidic dynasty and the Temple after the ten tribes seceded to form their own nation, the two tribes are [metaphorically] referred to as *Israel*, in contrast with the other ten tribes who are called *Jacob*." Thus, in terms of the future history of the nation, Jacob's message was: O ten tribes, gather around and obey the teachings of Judah and Benjamin, for they are on a higher spiritual level than you.

ויחי מטר בְּכָרִי אַתָּה כְּחִי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי יִתֵּר ד שְׁאֵת וְיִתֵּר עָז: פָּחַז בְּמִים אֶל-תּוֹמֵר כִּי

was about to tell some of them. This is intimated by the use of the name *Israel*, which, in contrast with *Jacob*, carries a spiritual connotation (Kli Yakar; *Alshich*).

Onkelos renders: '... And receive instruction from Israel your father.'

Compare *Sforno*: *Listen to Israel your father* — accept the way he has taught you all his life. If you do so, you will be sons of 'Israel' and he will be your father, because then you, like him, will be able to overcome angel and man, and you will not lose the benefits destined for you. [See 32:29].

... And accept my words inasmuch as: a) I address you as *Israel* — [the name symbolizing my spiritual and prophetic qualities] indicating that I speak with Divine Inspiration; and b) *I am your father* — so it is only proper that you accept my decree and advice (*Haamek Davar*).

The Midrash interprets the phrase as if it read וְשָׁמַעוּ אֶל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם. *And obey the God of Israel your father.*

3. Reuben.

Jacob rebuked his older sons, and the younger ones, by extension, felt rebuked as well. He did not rebuke them, however, until shortly before his death, because, as *Sifre Devarim* 82 records, Jacob said to Reuben: 'Reuben, my son, I did not rebuke you all these years so that you should not leave me and stay with my brother, Esau.'

וְאוֹבֵן בְּכָרִי אַתָּה — *Reuben, you are my firstborn.*

Jacob begins by giving tribute to Reuben's position, recounting what he should have achieved as first-born, then he explains why Reuben lost those privileges. The contextual flow, as *Rashbam* explains it, is:

Reuben, you are my firstborn, and as such you are my strength, etc.

כְּחִי — *My strength.*

I.e., with your birth, my potential strength began to be realized (*Ibn Ezra*).

Unlike Jacob himself who acquired his birthright by purchase from Esau, Reuben was the biological firstborn, and as such should have been Jacob's spiritual heir, since the firstborn can be expected to acquire more of his father's spirituality than the other sons (*Haamek Davar*).

וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי — *And my initial vigor.*

The term אֹנִי refers to *strength* [see *Hosh.* 12:9; *Isaiah* 40:26, 29] (*Rashi*).

In the literal sense this stich rephrases the previous stich, in the usual style of Scriptural poetry (*Rashbam*).

[*Rashi* follows the Rabbinic interpretation that since nothing in Scripture is superfluous, each stich has quite a distinct meaning of its own:]

My initial vigor — that is, you were born of the first drop of my semen, for Jacob had never experienced a seminal discharge in his life (*Rashi*; *Tanchuma Yashan*).

Thus, Reuben was conceived from Jacob's first intimacy with Leah. Though it is axiomatic in Rabbinic literature [*Yevamos* 34a] that 'a woman does not conceive from the first intimacy,' *Tosafos* (*ibid.* 76a s.v. וְשָׁלָא) offers that in this case, as in the case of Tamar [38:18] special preparations were made [מִעֲקָרָהּ בְּאֶצְבָּהּ] to facilitate conception. [See *Torah Sheleimah, Addendum* to 49:3 for a full discussion of this topic].

- 49 ³ Reuben, you are my firstborn,
3-4 my strength and my initial vigor,
foremost in rank and foremost in power.
⁴ Water-like impetuosity — you cannot be foremost,

יָתֵר שָׂאָה וְיָתֵר — Foremost [lit. excess] in rank [lit. elevation; uplifting] and foremost in power.

Since you were the firstborn, you should have been superior to your brothers in two major areas: priesthood [שָׂאָה, rank] and kingship [יָתֵר, power]. The term שָׂאָה, lit. *uplifting*, alludes to priesthood because the *kohanim* 'lift their hands' to confer the Priestly Blessing [Lev. 29:22]; the term יָתֵר, *power*, refers to kingship, the meaning it has in *I Samuel* 2:10 (*Rashi*; comp. *Onkelos*).

In defining שָׂאָה as *eminence*, *R' Hirsch* cites this meaning of the word in *Job* 12:11 and *Psalms* 62:5. As the firstborn you have the responsibility to be נָשִׂיא [prince: the 'elevated one'] of your brothers, the leader of the entire family ... a leader must bear the greatest burden; commensurately he must have greater power than his followers. Consequently, it may be that the word נָשִׂיא comes from the root נָשָׂא, *to bear*.

4. However, you have forfeited all these privileges.

What was responsible for this forfeiture? (*Rashi*)...

פָּחוּ בָקִים אֶל־תֹּתֵר — Water-like impetuosity [see *Rashi* below] — you cannot be foremost.

Because of the פָּחוּ, *impetuosity* and haste with which you rushed to vent your anger [in the incident

with Bilhah; see below], a hasty recklessness like that of fast-flowing waters — therefore אֶל־תֹּתֵר you cannot be foremost, you do not deserve to partake of the abundant superiorities that were designated for you (*Rashi*).

As noted in the comm. to 35:22, Reuben had repented. Although his repentance restored him to his status as a righteous individual, he was nevertheless disqualified from leadership of the family (*R' Munk*).

Actually, this forfeiture of special status applied only in later times. While in Egypt Reuben *did* exercise certain superiority over the other tribes as mentioned in *Bamidbar Rabbah* #13 (*Haamek Davar* v. 2).

Targum Yonasan [following the Midrash] interpretively comments: But because you sinned, my son, the birthright is given to Joseph¹¹, the kingship to Judah, and the priesthood to Levi. [Comp. *Rashi* to 35:23].

The Midrash notes that, Reuben's sin notwithstanding, Jacob did not reject him *entirely*. 'I am not alienating you outright, nor am I drawing you closer. I will leave the question of your status for the future. One day there will arise a leader of Israel by the name of Moses; he will deal with you as he sees fit.' Indeed, Moses prayed for Reuben and rehabilitated him morally when he began his blessing of the tribe by say-

1. The birthright [i.e., the distinction of being considered two tribes] was transferred to Joseph [with the result that his sons, Ephraim and Menasseh, became separate tribes (*Rashi* from *Berachos* 7b; *Rashi* to 35:22)]. This is clearly stated in *I Chronicles* 5:1: But since he [Reuben] desecrated his father's couch, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel.

The *Zohar* explains why it was granted to Joseph. When Jacob married Leah he thought he was marrying Rachel [29:25], in which case Rachel's oldest, Joseph, would have been the first born. Therefore, when the birthright was taken from Reuben, it was given to Joseph since it was originally destined to be his.

עֲלִיתָ מִשְׁכְּבִי אָבִיךָ אֶזְרָא חֲלָלָתָ יְצוּעִי עֲלָה:

ויחי
מטר:

ing, *May Reuben live and not die!* [Deut. 33:6].

Rashi translates פָּחוּ as a [segolate] noun, observing that it is similar to פָּחַר וְצָר (Dikdukei Rashi). It is therefore accented [with its cantillation] on the first syllable [פָּ] and the entire word is vowelized with patachs. Were it a verb in the past tense [meaning: *he was impetuous*], it would have been vowelized פָּחַח with a kametz and a patach, and with the accent on the last syllable [חָח].

Ramban similarly renders it as a noun, explaining the term as *hastiness, impulsiveness*, drawing a parallel from Judges 9:4 and from the Aramaic expression פָּחִיזָא, *reckless*. He also postulates that the term פָּחוּ might be a permutation of חָפוֹז, *haste*. Raibag and Radak, too, render it as referring to people who lack stability and act impulsively and impetuously.

According to the above comments, Jacob was telling Reuben: In your impetuous haste you ascended my couch like a rising and gushing torrent of water. (Compare the Scriptural description of uncontrollably gushing water in Isaiah 8:7f.)

— Through your haste and rash temper you irreversibly forfeited your pre-eminence; your action cannot be corrected any more than spilled water can be regathered (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

— As water is poured from place to place, so have your privileges been poured away (*Midrash*).

— You were afraid that if I lived with Bilhah, I would have more children, with whom you and your brothers would have to share my estate. By recklessly and impetuously tampering with Bilhah's bed, you sought to prevent the growth of my family and avoid a diminution of your inheritance. You will be punished measure for measure; instead of safeguarding your inheritance, you will lose your firstborn portion [see Ramban 35:22]; *אֶל תוֹתֵר, you will have no gain from it, only loss* (Ramban).

Ibn Ezra cites several interpretations: — פָּחוּ בְמִים, *O You who acted impetuously, like water that is spilled out with nothing left behind*, consequently *אֶל תוֹתֵר, you will not have pre-eminence*. Ibn Ezra rejects this interpretation on the grounds that the second phrase should have been vowelized *אֶל תוֹתֵר* according to this view.

— Others say: *You who acted like someone who poured out water and [אֶל תוֹתֵר] left nothing behind in the vessel*. Ibn Ezra rejects this because *אֶל* must be understood in the imperative sense, not as a simple statement of fact.

Ibn Ezra concludes by citing R' Saadiah Gaon: פָּחוּ בְמִים, *Even in as trivial a thing as water, אֶל תוֹתֵר, do not aspire to pre-eminence*. Ibn Ezra concurs, noting that *pachaz* means *empty, trivial* [see his comm. to Judges 9:4] and is not a permutation of *פָּחוּ* in *hurry*.

In the Talmud [*Shabbos* 55b] the word *pachaz* is homiletically interpreted as an acronym, combining the initial letters of several words. Among the several interpretations of the acronym is: פָּחוּ, חָפַז, וְזָלָה, *pachaz* [you were hasty], *chavtah* [you were guilty], *zaltah* [you acted disgracefully].

And what was the unstable act committed by Reuben? (Rashi) ...

— כִּי עֲלִיתָ מִשְׁכְּבִי אָבִיךָ — *Because you mounted your father's bed.*

Onkelos renders, *because you went up to your father's bedroom.*

As discussed in *Shabbos* 55b, Jacob's reference was to the incident after Rachel's death, which is delicately alluded to in 35:22. In an attempt to move Jacob's primary residence from Bilhah's tent into that of his mother Leah, Reuben tampered with his father's bed. Scripturally, Reuben's interfering with his father's conjugal bed is considered as such a moral offense, that the Torah [35:22] charges him

49 because you mounted your father's bed;
4 then you desecrated Him Who ascended my couch.

as if he had actually sinned with Bilhah [see commentary there].

From all this it is evident that the incident referred to could not have been one in which Reuben had *actually* sinned with Bilhah as is implied by the blunt expression *וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶת בִּלְהָה*, Reuben 'lay' with Bilhah [35:22]. To a son who was the strength and first of his father's vigor, one to whom superiority in rank and power belonged, an offense which otherwise would be considered quite lightly, is taken most seriously. Had Reuben actually committed a *real* sin, surely Jacob would not have used so mild and gentle an epithet as *פָּחַז בְּמִים*, *water-like impetuosity* (R' Hirsch).

According to another view in the Midrash [cf. also *Daas Zekeinim*], the reference is to the episode of the *dudaim* that Reuben gathered for his mother [30:14ff]. As a result of Reuben's gift, Jacob spent the night with Leah rather than Rachel [ibid. v. 16]. Jacob resentfully considered this as tampering with his beds, and now castigated Reuben for that invasion of his conjugal privacy.

אָז חָלַלְתָּ יְצוּעֵי עֲלֶה — Then [or: thus] you desecrated Him Who ascended my couch [lit. then you desecrated — my couch He ascended!].

— i.e., by interfering with my bed you desecrated the Name of the Divine Presence that used to ascend [i.e. hover above] my couch (Rashi).

Rashi's interpretation of this phrase follows the Talmud (*Shabbos* 55b), according to which Reuben — in the incident with Bilhah [35:22; see above] — had, in effect, transposed two couches, that of the Divine Presence and that of Jacob. Thus, by his vile act, Reuben desecrated the Name of the Divine Presence, as well as the honor of his father.

Rashi there explains that this interpretation is based upon the use of the third person *עָלָה*, He [i.e., God]

ascended, rather than the second person *עָלִיתָ*, you ascended. Furthermore, Rashi writes, before the Tent of Meeting [dwelling place of God's Presence in the Tabernacle] was constructed, God's Presence rested in the tents of the righteous. Jacob placed a couch for the Divine Presence in the tents of each of his wives, and wherever the Divine Presence came to 'rest' so to speak, there Jacob spent the night.

Ramban cites the Talmudic interpretation that the object of the 'desecration' was the Divine Presence, which abided above Jacob's couch. He points to *1 Chronicles* 5:1, however, which clearly states that it was *his father's couch* that Reuben defiled, and not that of the Divine Presence. Ramban resolves this difficulty by suggesting that it was indeed the Divine Presence that was defiled, but out of respect for God, Scripture avoids explicitly stating that Reuben desecrated the *Shechinah*; *1 Chronicles*, therefore, speaks euphemistically of Jacob's couch.

Ramban proceeds to suggest that Jacob might have been referring only to the desecration of his personal honor, the tenor of his charge being: 'Then you defiled me.' In deference to his own self-respect, however, Jacob spoke in third person: *then you desecrated my couch* which 'he,' i.e., I, your father used to ascend. Similarly, the passage in *1 Chronicles* 5:1: *inasmuch as he desecrated his father's couch*, is also a Scriptural euphemism meaning that Reuben desecrated Jacob whose couch it was.

According to Chizkuni, Jacob addressed to Reuben only the first words of this phrase: *אָז חָלַלְתָּ*, then you desecrated. He then turned to his other sons, and incredulously

וַיַּח מִטָּה ה' שָׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֲחִים כָּלִי חָמָס מִכְרִיתֵיהֶם:

exclaimed, 'Do not wonder why I speak so harshly to him; יִצְוֵי עֲלָה, *he ascended my couch!*'

B'chor Shor interprets: *Then you desecrated the one [i.e. yourself] who ascended my couch!* That is, by your act of 'climbing up' to your father's bed, you — the one who perpetrated this invasion of my privacy — desecrated yourself by forfeiting thereby many of the privileges that would otherwise have been yours as firstborn. Thus the verse reads in I Chronicles 5: *And when he desecrated his father's couch, his birthright was given to Joseph.*

... My couch, however, remained עֲלָה, *lofty and inviolable* (R' Saadiah Gaon). Your impetuous indiscretion is all the more serious because of my couch's unusual degree of sanctity. Since not one of my children was unfit — like Ishmael or Esau in the case of my grandfather and father respectively — to be a member of the chosen people יִצְוֵי עֲלָה, *my couch was loftier than that of my forefathers.* How could you desecrate such a couch! (*Tosafos Ha-Rosh*).

Radak renders עֲלָה as *removed* [see Psalms 102:25], interpreting: 'From the very day on which you perpetrated that desecration, יִצְוֵי עֲלָה, *my couch was removed from me,*' for ever since that day Jacob never consorted with Bilhah.

The word יִצְוֵי means *couch; bed*. It is so called because it is spread [root יָצַע] with pads and linens. The term occurs frequently in Scripture; see for example Psalms 3:7, 132:3 (Rashi).

5. Simeon and Levi.

Having explained why Reuben forfeited the prerogatives of the birthright, Jacob proceeds to explain why Simeon and Levi, the next oldest, were also unworthy of kingship. Men of the sword are unworthy of being 'the king who by justice establishes the land' [Proverbs 29:4] (Sforno; Abarbanel; Malbim).

שָׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֲחִים — *Simeon and Levi are comrades* [lit. *brothers*].

[The word אֲחִים cannot be taken in its literal, biological sense, for all of Jacob's sons were *brothers*. Rather, as the commentators explain, the sense is they are a *pair* and *acted* like one:]

That is, they are *real* brothers in the sense that they unite in fraternity and brotherhood in counsel and deed (Ramban; see below).

— They harbored the same thoughts in the conspiracies against Shechem and Joseph. [Although the Torah does not specifically mention that Simeon and Levi instigated the plot against Joseph] it is clear that the passage [37:19]: *And they said man to his brother ... "So, now, come and let us kill him,"* can refer only to them. It could not refer to Reuben and Judah, since they were opposed to slaying Joseph [37:21-26]; it could not refer to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah [Dan, Naftali, Gad or Asher], since Joseph befriended them [37:2] and their hatred for him was not so great; Issachar and Zevulun [Leah's youngest sons] are ruled out because they would not have presumptuously suggested such a serious course before their elders. Consequently, the reference there must be to Simeon and Levi whom their father now described as *comrades* (Rashi from Tanchuma).

Actually, one could refute Rashi's argument. If Issachar and Zevulun are ruled out because they would not have spoken presumptuously before their elders, Simeon and Levi too should be ruled out since their older brother, Reuben, was present at the time. However, because they were capable of taking strong initiatives, as demonstrated by their activity in Shechem, it could be expected that they would speak up even in the presence of an older brother. Furthermore,

The Midrash interprets: *Simeon and Levi are brothers*. — You acted as 'brothers' when you avenged your sister Dinah in the matter of Shechem [the Midrash cites 34:25 where Simeon and Levi are referred to in that context as *brothers of Dinah* because they had come to her defense]; but you were not 'brothers' to Joseph whom you sold.

Their weapon-ry is a stolen craft.

sense, however, the term **תָּמָא** may refer to the imitation of someone else's form of behavior. It is in this latter sense that *Rashi* perceives it here in his primary interpretation.

— Your preoccupation with murder [that is, the wielding of **קכרת**, *weaponry* (see below), as illustrated by your participation in murderous plots] is not a Jewish trait; you have *usurped* this behavior from Esau whose blessings included [27:40]: *By your sword you shall live*. Such preoccupations should be *his*, and you usurped it from him. The term **קכרת** denotes *weaponry*. In Greek the word for sword is *machaira* (Rashi from Midrash).

Drawing from an alternate interpretation in the Midrash, *Rashi* records an opinion that the term *מִקְרָתֵיהֶם* means their *dwelling place* [= *קוֹרְתֵיהֶם*, the letters ו and כ being interchangeable]. He renders: [*They introduced*] כְּלֵי חַסֵּם, *instruments of plunder* (lit. *robbery*), *מִקְרָתֵיהֶם*. [in] *their habitations*, i.e., they accustomed themselves to the use of weaponry even in Eretz Yisrael, the land meant for the habitation of Israel. Comp. the term *מִקְרָתֵיךָ* in *Ezekiel* 16:3. *Rashi* concludes that 'this is how *Onkelos* renders the passage.'

Onkelos literally reads: 'Mighty men – in the land of their dwelling they did mightily,' [*Onkelos* is thus metaphorically referring to Simeon and Levi themselves as **קִּיָּקוּם**, *weapons of plunder*, just as in *II Sam.* 1:27 Saul and Jonathan are referred to as **קִּיָּקוּם**, *weapons of war* (see *Rashi* there).]

Ibn Ezra and Radak render similarly, explaining that *מְבֹרָתָם*, *their dwelling place*, is to be interpreted as if it read *בְּמִקְבְּרֵיהֶם*, *in their dwelling place*. Scripture often uses such elliptic constructions. See, for example, *|| Kins 16:8 ה' בָּיִת ה' ||* *Samuel 2:29*

במעון=מעון. The sense here accordingly is: *They wielded weapons of plunder in the land of their dwelling with their neighbors with whom they dwell peaceably and had no reason to go to war.*

According to Ramban, the intimation of מגרתיך=מכרתיק, *their dwelling places*, in our context is that *the essence of their lives*, i.e. the means by which they sustain themselves, is *their instrument of plunder*. Comp. מגרתיכם above 47:9.

Rashbam also relates מכרתיקם to מכרתיק in Ezekiel 16:3, but he interprets it as *kinship*. He suggests that this stich parallels the first, the contextual flow being: 'Simeon and Levi are comrades, *weapons of plunder are their kinship*,' [i.e. their kinship is based on violence]. B'chor Shor interprets similarly, relating מכרתיק to מקר, *his acquaintance*, in II Kings 12:6, the sense here being: *their affinity for one another is based upon the sword of plunder*; much plunder resulted from their scheming. Sechel Tov similarly relates the term to recognize: They are recognized as men of plunder.

6. בְּסֶדֶם אֶל־תָּבֹא וּנְפֹשִׁי — *Into their conspiracy, may my soul not enter!*

Jacob was disclaiming any knowledge of their plot when they answered Shechem and his father Chamor 'cleverly' [see 34:13]. As mentioned earlier, Jacob was angry with them lest people think that their evil scheme was suggested by him, a charge which might result in

the profanation of God's Name (Ramban).

Thus, in the literal sense, Jacob is pronouncing a denial, emphasizing that Simeon and Levi's murders in Shechem were not in Jacob's behalf or with his consent. The future [imperfect] tense, *may not enter*, is used here in place of the past tense, *had not entered* (Akeidah; Ralbag).

This follows Radak and many other 'literal' commentators who maintain that both this stich and the next are examples of 'parallelism' — that Jacob expressed the same thought in different ways, referring in both cases to the incident of Shechem.

According to the Midrash, however [see Rashi in footnote below], since nothing in the Torah is superfluous, both stiches must be allusions to *different* incidents. The use of the future tense תָּבֹא ... תִּתְּחַר, *shall come ... shall join*, indicates that they refer prophetically to incidents that would occur in the lives of Simeon and Levi's descendants. The end of the passage, which employs past tense verbs, refers to incidents perpetrated by Simeon and Levi themselves. Jacob does not want his name connected with any wrong the two have done in the past, or will do in the future.¹¹

The term בְּסֶדֶם, *into their conspiracy*,

1. Following the Midrash [which apparently bases itself on the future tense of Jacob's disclaimer], Rashi interprets the parallel stiches in this passage as prophetic allusions to *future revolts* involving descendants of Simeon and Levi— Zimri [Numbers 25:6ff] and Korach [ibid. 16:1] respectively. Jacob now exclaimed that he did not wish to be associated with either incident:

Into their conspiracy, may my soul not enter: This alludes to the incident of Zimri, when members of the tribe of Simeon assembled to ask Moses, 'May Zimri, our leader, marry this Midianite woman? Should you forbid it, who permitted you to marry a Midianite woman?' [See Sanhedrin 82b]. With regard to this provocation, Jacob exclaimed, 'Let not my name be associated with that event!' And accordingly, when the Torah later traces Zimri's genealogy, it reads [Numbers 25:14]: Zimri, the son of Salu, prince of a father's house among the Simeonites — but it does not trace his genealogy back to Jacob by stating 'son of Jacob.'

49 ⁶ Into their conspiracy, may my soul not enter!
 6 With their congregation, do not join,
 O my honor!

derives from the verb סוד, *secret*, and refers in this context to secret deliberations: hence, *conspiracy* or *plot*. According to *Ralbag*, בקהלם parallels בקהלים; it derives from סוד and is synonymous with בהתקדם, *in their establishment*. It refers to the time when they gathered to hatch a secret plot (*Ibn Ezra; Rashbam*).

R' Munk cites the *Zohar* that after his initial hesitation at granting a blessing to tribes that had engaged in such savage behavior, Jacob decided that they should be blessed, but he left the text of the blessing to Moses, who would bless the tribes just before his death. When that time came, however, a rift had developed between Simeon and Levi; they were no longer indistinguishable from one another. The tribe of Levi had redeemed their ancestor's atrocity at Shechem. After the sin of the Golden Calf, when Moses called out אֵלֵי לֵוִי, *Whoever is loyal to HASHEM, come to me* (*Exodus 32:26*), only Levi stood to him unanimously. And when Zimri, the Simeonite leader, sinned brazenly, it was Phineas, a descendant of Levi, who courageously and gloriously redeemed the honor of God and saved Israel from the Divine wrath (*Numbers* ch. 25). Thus, Simeon remained sinful, but Levi emerged as the spiritual elite of Israel. The Midrash likens Levi to a man who borrowed from the king, but later not

only repaid him but was able to extend loans to him. Simeon, on the other hand, was like someone who borrowed and never repaid — but kept going further into debt. Moses blessed Levi abundantly, but he avoided mentioning Simeon by name. Just as Simeon's inheritance in Eretz Yisrael was sprinkled through the territory of Judah, so his blessing was included in that of Judah. (See *Joshua 19:1,9*.)

בְּקֵהֶלֶם אֶל־תִּחַר בְּבָרִי — With [lit. in] their congregation, do not join [lit. unite], O my honor.

... This was a further disclaimer regarding their behavior in Shechem. Earlier, Jacob had denied complicity in their deceitful reply to Shechem. Now he denied that he was associated with them when they gathered upon the Shechemites and slew them (*Ramban*).

According to the Rabbinic interpretation cited by *Rashi* [see footnote], this referred prophetically to the time when Levi's descendant Korach, would assemble his band to make a schism in the nation. Jacob refused to be mentioned among Korach's ancestors in that connection.

The word תִּחַר is used for both third person feminine imperfect: [she] shall not be united, or second person masculine

With their congregation, do not join, O my honor! This alludes to the time when Korach will assemble a congregation against Moses and Aaron. Regarding this occasion, too, Jacob exclaimed, 'Let my name not be associated with them!' And so it was, for Korach's genealogy is listed [*Numb. 16:1*]: Korach, son of Itzhar the son of Kehath, the son of Levi — but it does not say, 'the son of Jacob.' However, in *I Chronicles 6:22f* — where Korach's genealogy is traced in connection with the Levitical Temple service — the passage reads, 'The son of Kehath, the son of Levi, the son of Israel' [*Tanchuma*].

[According to a view in *Sanhedrin* 109b, the first stich in our passage alludes to the סְפִיָּים, *Spies* (who slandered Eretz Yisrael, maintaining that it was unconquerable [see *Numbers 13:4*]). *Rashi* in *Sanhedrin* ad. loc. explains that there too, none of the Spies are traced back to Jacob. However, the obvious question arises: What special role did Simeon or Levi play in the episode of the Spies; the tribe of Levi was not even represented among the Spies, nor is the tribe of Simeon mentioned as having played an especially prominent role in that episode?

Maharsha suggests that possibly there was a tradition that the Simeonite among them was the spokesman for the Spies.]

ויחי מטו כבדכי כי באפם הרגו איש וברצונם עקרו-שור: אָרוּר אָפֶם כִּי עָז וְעִבְרָתָם

imperative: *you are not to be united*. The translation that it is the masculine imperative follows *Rashi*, who explains that this rendering is required by the word *כבוד*, honor, which is a masculine noun. Thus, as *Rashi* explains, the syntax requires that the phrase be interpreted as if Jacob were speaking to his honor, saying: *O you, my honor, do not unite with their gathering!* [In the first stich the phrase *אֵלֶיָּהֶם נָפְשִׁי*, must be rendered in third person feminine imperfect, *may my soul not enter*, rather than *O, my soul, do not enter*, since *נָפֶשׁ*, soul, is feminine and cannot take a masculine verb.]

איש — For in their anger [or: fury] they murdered people [lit. a man].

A reference to Chamor and the people of Shechem [34:25]. Midrashically, they are spoken of in the singular as *איש*, [one] man, since Simeon and Levi had as little fear as if the entire populace was only one man [i.e., the fact that Simeon and Levi were faced with attacking many men was no deterrent to them]. A similar expression appears in the episode of Gideon [Judges 6:16]: *And you shall slay the Midianites as one man*; similarly concerning Egypt [Exodus 15:1]: *the horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea* [a reference to the whole army which was as insignificant in God's view as if it consisted of but a single horse and rider] (*Rashi* citing the *Midrash*).

In the literal sense however, *Rashi* explains that the singular term *man* is a collective noun referring to people in general, the con-

notation being: *they killed every man with whom they were angry*. [*Ramban* renders similarly.]

וּבְרָצֹנָם עָקְרוּ-שׁוֹר — And at their whim they maimed an ox.

— I.e., they sought to disable Joseph who is figuratively likened to an ox; see *Deut.* 33:17. The word *עָקְרוּ*, in Old French, *essarter*, means *hamstring; disable; lame*. Comp. *עָקַר* in *Joshua* 11:6 (*Rashi*).^[1]

Rashi's interpretation that *עָקַר* denotes their intention to disable Joseph is based on the fact that they were not successful in carrying out their design; to the contrary, Joseph was still thriving as absolute ruler of Egypt! That the Torah labels their intention to disable Joseph as if it were a *fait accompli* is significant, since it is axiomatic that God does not consider evil intent as tantamount to the deed. Possibly, since Simeon and Levi had actually begun the evil act designed to disable Joseph — by throwing him into an infested pit — they are considered as having committed a *fait accompli*. Additionally, perhaps the phraseology *וּבְרָצֹנָם*, and at their whim, indicates in itself that it was only their desire to lame, but not that they did so (*Maskil l'David*; *Tzeidah laDerech*; see *Mizrachi*).

Ramban interprets *ox* in the literal collective sense as denoting the cattle of Shechem. He explains the flow of the passage: *In their fury they killed men*, i.e., every man of Shechem; *וּבְרָצֹנָם*, and by their whim, i.e., premeditatedly, when their fury had subsided, *they proceeded to destroy the cattle*. Jacob specifically mentioned this now to formally disassociate himself from every aspect of their plot — even in their subsequent plunder of the cattle and property of Shechem.

1. In *Megillah* 9a our verse is listed among the several in Scripture which the seventy-two Elders of Israel were inspired to subtly emend in their Greek translation of Scripture, undertaken at the command of King Ptolemy (Philadelphus). To soften the denunciation of the Tribal Ancestors, each one of the Sages, sequestered in separate cubicles, produced the same Divinely inspired translation of this passage, which read: *For in their fury they killed an ox, and in their capriciousness uprooted the manger*. See also 1:1; 1:26.

49 For in their anger they murdered people
 7 and at their whim they maimed an ox.
 7 Accursed is their rage for it is fierce,
 and their wrath for it was harsh;

It is similar to one who sees his acquaintance committing a transgression and prayerfully exclaims, 'May I not be associated with this act!' thereby publicly announcing his disassociation with that deed (*Marpei Lashon*).

According to *Onkelos*, the word שׂוֹר, ox, should be interpreted as if it were vowelized שׂוֹר, wall, as in v. 22 below; cf. also בְּשׂוֹרֵי in *Psalms* 92:12. The intent of our passage would be: and in their capriciousness they uprooted a [city fortified by a] wall. In this sense, *Ramban* explains, the verb עָקַר means uprooted as in *Zephaniah* 2:4.

According to an opinion cited in *Radak*, the metaphor of ox, largest animal of the cattle families, figuratively alludes to Chamor, the ruler of Shechem, and his son Shechem, the prince [above 34:2]. Scripture commonly describes the strong and powerful as אֵילִים, rams [see *Exodus* 15:15] and צִוְרוֹת, he-goats [see *Isaiah* 14:9].

7. אָרוּר אַפֶּם בִּי צוֹ — Accursed is their rage for it is fierce.

Rashi explains: Even when Jacob was chastising them he did not curse them but their anger. The wicked Balaam similarly observed [*Numb.* 23:8]: How can I curse [Israel] whom God [El] has not cursed? — [if even in fury he did not curse them but only their anger, shall I curse them? (*Midrash*)].

[Actually, Balaam said that אֵל (El) lit. God, did not curse Israel, but the *Midrash* interprets this as a reference to Jacob who pronounced his curse against only their anger in consonance with God's will; or the word El may be a reference to Jacob himself, whom God called El (see *comm.* to 33:20).]

As the Sages note in *Berachos* 10a, the righteous pray for the destruction of sin, but not of sinners. Let the sinners repent so that they will survive while their sins will no longer exist.

This was either a prayer or a prophetic prognostication. The sense is: May their anger diminish, for it is fierce. For just as blessed often implies increase, so does cursed denote the reverse (*Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*; *Tur*).

Lekach Tov similarly interprets אָרוּר in our passage as related to the term אָרוּר, plucked, in *Psalms* 80:13, the sense being: May their anger subside.

Comp. *Chizkuni*: This was not a curse but a blessing, as if to say: May they not succeed in their wrathful ways, so that they not accustom themselves to be bad-tempered. [See *Moed Katan* 9a where it is recorded that even statements that appeared to be curses were actually blessings.]

The term אָף, rage [lit. nose] metaphorically alludes to the flaring of the nostrils during one's anger (*Rashi Exodus* 15:8; see above 27:45; 30:2).

Haamek Davar explains that אָף refers to uncontrollable fury one feels when he loses his temper, while עֶבְרָה [wrath] in the next stich refers to residual anger that one continues to feel even after the initial fury has subsided. The differing manifestations of rage and residual anger can be seen earlier in v. 6. In describing the result of their rage, that verse says that they killed people, but after the rage was spent — and they still harbored inner anger — they destroyed cattle, but not human life.

וְעִבְרָתָם בִּי קָשָׁתָה — And their wrath for it was harsh.

This parallels the previous stich. Jacob repeats essentially the same thought in different words for emphasis (*Ibn Ezra*; *Radak*).

כִּי קָשְׁתָּהּ אֶחְלֶקֶם בְּעֶקֶב וְאֶפְיֹצֵם
בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

ויחי
מט/ח

ה' יְהוּדָה אֶתָּה יוֹדוּךָ אֶחָיִךְ יִדְךָ בְּעֶרְףְךָ

The Midrash homiletically reads this passage as if the word were vowelized נַעֲבִירָתָם and *their sin for it was harsh*.

When they are together, they are a destructive force, therefore ...

אֶחְלֶקֶם בְּעֶקֶב וְאֶפְיֹצֵם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל – *I will separate them within Jacob, and I will disperse them in Israel.*

(a) I will separate them from one another in that Levi shall not be numbered among the tribes [see *Numbers* 26:62; this difference in status between the two would diminish their feelings of equality and closeness]. (b) Each of these tribes will be dispersed throughout Israel. You will find that most poor people, scribes and elementary grade teachers were of the tribe of Simeon. This was so in order that the tribe be dispersed [since such people were required by their professions to seek their livelihood among others]. Regarding the tribe of Levi, God caused them to roam from one threshing floor to another to collect the priestly offerings [תרומות] and tithes, in effect causing them to be 'dispersed'. Their dispersion, however, was more respectable than Simeon's [since Levi had the status of a tribe especially dedicated to the service of God] (*Rashi* from *Midrash* and *Tanchuma*). [See also *Rashi* to *I Chron.* 4:27.]

According to another opinion in the Midrash, Jacob's prophetic pronouncement was fulfilled when twenty-four thousand Simeonites, followers of Zimri, perished [see *Numbers* 25:9; *Sanhedrin* 82a], and their widows were scattered among all the other tribes [see also Midrash cited in *Tz'ror HaMor*].

By dividing and scattering these two tribes, Jacob intended to neutralize the destructiveness caused by their unity. Indeed, when the tribes received their portions in *Eretz Yisrael*, Simeon and Levi were separated geographically. Simeon's cities were sprinkled throughout the southern part of Judah's portion [see *Joshua* 19:1]. Levi did not receive a territory *per se*, but the Levites were given forty-eight cities (among which were the six עָרֵי מְקֻלָּט, *Cities of Refuge*) [see *Numbers* 35:1ff] which were scattered throughout the territories of all the tribes [see *Joshua* 21] (*Ramban*).

Cf. *Aggadas Bereishis*: Jacob said, If these two tribes dwell in proximity to one another, they will destroy the whole world; I will therefore scatter them – *I will separate them within Jacob and disperse them in Israel.*

This, then, is the contextual flow: אֲרִירֹא אֶפֶס, *may their rage be lessened*, by their lowly state and the hard life caused by their being dispersed and scattered (*Sforno*).

According to many commentators there is a very positive implication in these words. Occasions arise where zealotness is a necessary trait, as it was in the case of Phineas. Too much zealotness concentrated in one place, however, is dangerous. For that reason *I will separate them within Jacob*, so there will be only a few of them in any one place, *and disperse them in Israel*. In this way, all of the tribes will be able to benefit from their trait of zealotness, but because of their dispersion they will be more restrained than if they were geo-

49 I will separate them within Jacob,
8 and I will disperse them in Israel.

• Judah — you, your brothers shall acknowledge;
your hand will be at your enemies' nape.

graphically united. Thus neutralized, theirs will not be a *cursed* trait but an effective one in avenging Evil (R' Yosef Kimchi; *Haamek Davar*; *Malbim*).

[The parallelism of Jacob and Israel in this context is not clear. The name Jacob, as often noted in the commentary, represents the more *materialistic* side of the Patriarch and his descendants, while the name Israel represents their *spiritual* aspect. Possibly this duality is the basis of the many Midrashic interpretations [see *Bereishis Rabbah* 97:5] which refer the first clause, *I will separate them within Jacob* to Simeon and the second clause *and disperse them in Israel*, to Levi, the more 'spiritual' of the two. Comp. Moses' charge to Levi [Deut. 32:10]: *They shall teach Your judgments to Jacob; Your Torah to Israel.*]¹¹

8. Judah.

When Judah heard Jacob rebuking his brothers this way, his face blanched and he began drawing back into a corner of the room, afraid that Jacob might chastise him over the affair of Tamar. So Jacob called him soothingly, "Judah — you [the 'you' is emphatic] are not like them [I am not about to rebuke you as I did them]! You your brothers shall acknowledge!" (*Midrash*; *Rashi*).

יהודה אתה יודוך אֶכְיֶיךָ — Judah — you, your brothers shall acknowledge.

The translation of יודוך as *acknowledge* follows Radak in *Shorashim*, s.v. ירה who explains it as: they shall ascribe majesty to you.

Rashbam similarly explains the word [from הוד, majesty] as: *they will ascribe majesty to you*. After

1. R' Hirsch maintains that Jacob refers to the oppressed *Galus* aspect of the Jewish people, while Israel refers to them when they are triumphant, as was Israel when he defeated the angel of Esau. In a flourishing Eretz Yisrael, the impetuosity of these two tribes would be a divisive force, detrimental to the general harmony. The verb used for *dispersed*, נָפַץ, connotes the breaking of the whole into the smallest possible pieces. This was the case in Eretz Yisrael, where, as noted by Rashi, the Levites received no province and were forced to depend on the good will of land owners for their tithes; and the Simeonites had small enclaves, completely dependent upon the surrounding Judeans. Thus, when Israel was a flourishing state, Simeon and Levi's political influence was nullified — crushed and scattered into the smallest pieces.

In the Jacob-state of exile, however, the strength and zeal of Simeon and Levi are essential to the morale and pride of the people; the nation could not afford to let their energies be dissipated. The exilic separation of Simeon and Levi is expressed by the verb חָלַק, which implies a portion of value from which people can benefit. In exile, the professions of teacher, scribe, and synagogue functionary would cause the people of Simeon and Levi to be found everywhere. With their fiery, proud dispositions they would keep alive the nation's courage, fire and pride in the Jewish spirit, outliving the loss of the state.

As R' Munk concludes, their physical drive would be redirected and would find a happier and more productive outlet when transformed into spiritual strength. Then the generosity and vigor of the two brothers will serve the common good. The initial harm thereby transformed itself into a source of benefit and blessing in the service of God.

censuring the older sons, stripping Reuben of his privileges and scattering Simeon and Levi, Jacob turned to Judah. 'To 'you,' he said, 'your brothers will concede the kingship.'

This is evidenced by the end of the passage, *your father's sons will prostrate themselves before you*.

Chizkuni interprets in the sense of praise: *You, your brothers will praise and respect* [since their success will come through you (Alshich).]

— Your brothers shall acknowledge your primacy because you confessed your relationship with Tamar [see 38:26. This is a play on words based on the fact that the Hebrew for *acknowledge*, *confess*, *praise*, *pay homage* is the same] (Tanchuma).¹¹

Your brothers praise you; your mother rendered praise when you were born [see 29:35]; and I, too, herewith praise you (*Midrash*).

R' Shimon bar Yochai said, the essence of this 'acknowledgment' is that all Judah's brothers will be called by his name. A man does not say, 'I am a Reubenite or a Simeonite' but 'I am a Yehudi' [Judahite; Jew] (*Midrash*).

According to *Sechel Tov* the intimation is: *יהודה אָתָּה, You are* [truly what is implied by your name] *Judah*. That is, your very name denotes acknowledgment; confession; praise. Your mother

was the first to offer praise [29:35]; therefore you too confessed over the matter of Tamar [... and for this very reason your brothers will acknowledge you as their superior (Toldos Yitzchak)].

As a reward for his acknowledgment, the Messiah will descend from him and save Israel, as it is written [Isaiah 11:10]: *In that day shall nations seek the root of Jesse, that stands for an ensign of the peoples* (Yalkut).

According to Abarbanel, after disqualifying the three older brothers as future leaders, Jacob recognized in his fourth son, Judah, the necessary virtues of leadership. Abarbanel elicits from the succeeding verses four reasons which prompted this choice: (a) Judah's brothers respected his natural authority without feeling jealousy towards him as they did toward Joseph; (b) he had emerged victorious from all his undertakings; (c) he had succeeded in establishing harmony among his brothers; (d) he was not impetuous like Reuben, nor did he have violent tendencies like Simeon and Levi. Instead, he possessed the majestic calm that comes from confidence in one's own powers.

יָדְךָ בְּעֶרְךָ אִיבִיךָ — *Your hand will be at your enemies' nape.*

A metaphor meaning, *You will be victorious. Your enemies will turn*

1. In *Makkos* 11b we learn that [by setting the precedent of acknowledging wrong in the incident with Tamar] Judah, in effect, was instrumental in Reuben's public confession of wrongdoing in the matter of Bilhah [see *comm.* to 37:29].

Tosafos ad loc. [s.v. מִנְּכֶם] mentions that we find a Scriptural allusion for this in our passage, which the *Targum* interprets as: *אָתָּה הוֹדִיתָ כִּי חוֹרֵית אָחִיךָ, you acknowledged* [i.e., publicly confessed] *so will your brothers acknowledge*, i.e., just as you were not ashamed to confess, so did your brother, Reuben, come forward and confess. [Current editions of *Targum Onkelos* read differently. Apparently the *Tosafist* is referring to another version then extant. Cf. *Targum Yonasan*. See *Overview* to *Vayigash*.]

49 Your father's sons will prostrate themselves
9 before you.
9 A lion cub is Judah;

their backs and flee you (*Sforno*; *Akeidah*; *Ralbag*).

This prophecy was fulfilled in the days of David [Judah's descendant]. See *II Samuel* 22:41: וְאֵינִי תַתַּח לִי עוֹרֶךְ, You have given me the nape of my enemies (*Rashi*).

Ibn Ezra connects this with the following phrase: Because you will be victorious in war, your father's sons will prostrate themselves to you — as before a monarch.

יִשְׁתַּחֲוּ לְךָ בְּנֵי אָבִיר — Your father's sons will prostrate themselves before you.

— In deference to you as their monarch (*Sforno*).

Some leaders are great warriors but are ineffective when it comes to leading their own countrymen at home. With others, the reverse is true. Judah possessed both qualities: not only will his hand be at his enemies' nape, but his father's sons, i.e. his own countrymen, will prostrate themselves before him, acknowledging him as a king who can lead in peace and justice (*Haamek Davar*).

Isaac had blessed Jacob with the expression *your mother's sons* [27:29], but since Jacob had four wives, he used the all-inclusive expression *your father's sons* (*Rashi*).

Had Jacob said *your mother's sons*, the implication would have been that only Judah's brothers from *Leah* would prostrate themselves. Additionally, as *Mizrachi* in 27:29 points out, the reason Isaac preferred to use the expression *mother's sons* was that he did not want to associate himself directly [by saying *your father's sons*] with making one of his children subservient; Jacob, however, had no choice but to say *your father's sons*.

9. Jacob introduces the metaphor of a lion cub for Judah in order to heighten the impression of majesty and power that was manifest in Judah's personality (*Abarbanel*).
גֹּדֵר אֲרִיָּה יְהוּדָה — A lion cub is Judah.

The addition of *cub* is significant since the metaphor *lion* would have sufficed to imply majesty and power (*Maskil l'David*; *Tzeidah laDerech*).

Rashbam interprets that Jacob specifically likened Judah to a lion cub, since it is stronger and swifter than an old lion.

— Although Judah was not yet a 'lion' inasmuch as he had not attained kingship, nevertheless he was a lion cub [with the potential to become a lion], prevailing over his brothers, and destined to reign (*Sforno*).

— You combine the courage of youth with the prudence of age. You have no lust for fighting and plunder for their own sake; as a lion you are above low robbery and murder (*R' Hirsch*).

Onkelos interpretively paraphrases our passage: 'The dominion shall be in the beginning, and in the end the kingdom shall be increased from the House of Judah ...'

According to *Rashi*, *Onkelos* means that the dual expression *lion* and *cub* alluded to two periods in the life of Judah's descendant King David. When he was still a 'cub' under Saul, he began to lead Israel (*II Samuel* 5:2) and then he became a 'lion' when they proclaimed him king over them. [Accordingly, *Onkelos* rendered the verse: first David will be a ruler, and later he will be anointed king.]

Cf. *R' Shmuel ben Chofni*: The Davidic

יחי מטי יהודה מטָרף בְּנֵי עֲלִיתָ בָרַע רָבָץ בְּאֶרֶץ וּבְלָבִיא מִי יִקְיָמוּנוּ לֹא-יָסוּר

dynasty is compared to a lion to reflect its majestic stature and strength. See *II Samuel* 17:10. Jacob called Judah a lion, mightiest of the beasts [*Proverbs* 30:30], since Judah was the mightiest of the tribes [*I Chron.* 5:2]. Possibly, Jacob used the metaphor of a cub to allude to David's rise to prominence when he was still weak, for only later did he become powerful [*II Samuel* 5:10; *I Chron.* 11:9].

HaKsav V'HaKabbalah offers a novel interpretation that גור is related to the verb גרה, *provoked*, the sense being: *Judah is a provoked lion* — potentially the most dangerous kind.

From [the] prey — מטָרף בְּנֵי עֲלִיתָ [lit. *from the tearing apart*], my son, you elevated yourself [lit. *you have risen*].

The translation follows *Rashi*:

Jacob had suspected Judah of being responsible for the murder of Joseph, a deed he described with the word מטָרף, *tearing apart*: as Jacob said שָׂרָף טָרַף יוֹסֵף, *Joseph has surely been torn to bits!* [37:33]. In assigning responsibility for that crime, Jacob said חִיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלְתוֹהוּ, *a savage beast devoured him!* [ibid], an allusion to Judah, whom Jacob suspected of responsibility, for the word *beast* refers to Judah who is described as a *lion*. Now Jacob declares that Judah is vindicated: not only had he not been the one who 'tore Joseph to bits' — he elevated himself above such a crime by being the one who saved Joseph's life. It was Judah who said [ibid. v. 26]: 'What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood!' You also rose above the situation when, in the incident of Tamar, you spared her from death by admitting your responsibility [see *comm.* to 38:26 s.v. אֲצַדֵּק מִמֶּנִּי] (*Rashi*). [See *Overview*].

Thus, *Rashi* perceives our passage to

say: *You my son, had risen above the act of 'tearing', of which I had suspected you; to the contrary, it was you who were instrumental in sparing him.*

Gur Aryeh explains that Jacob had suspected Judah of foul play since he knew that Judah, as the tribe that would one day possess the kingship, would feel the most threatened by Joseph's dreams, in which he seemed to aspire to sovereignty over the brothers.

Kli Yakar interprets similarly: Although your temperament is that of a lion cub, you kept aloof from the incident when Joseph was his brother's prey. That Judah removed himself from his brother's intention may be inferred from the fact that Judah 'descended' from among his brothers [38:1] as he did not wish to be associated with them after their act.

It is clear from the commentators to *Rashi* [*Mizrachi*; *Tzeidah laDerech*; *Be'er Yitzchak*] that בְּנֵי is not to be connected with מטָרף (reading: בְּנֵי מטָרף, *from the tearing of my son*) but that בְּנֵי is to be connected with עֲלִיתָ [lit. *you ascended*, reading: בְּנֵי עֲלִיתָ, *my son, you elevated yourself*]. This is supported by the cantillation under מטָרף, a disjunctive *tipcha*, which separates it from the word בְּנֵי. Since *Rashi* divided the opening words of his comment on this passage into two phrases, בְּנֵי עֲלִיתָ and מטָרף, it is clear that he too understood the phrase that way.

There is a view in *Sechel Tov*, however, that בְּנֵי is to be connected in the construct state with מטָרף, rendering: בְּנֵי מטָרף, *from the act of preying upon my son (Joseph)* (reading: בְּנֵי מטָרף, *you kept aloof*). This is based on a differing tradition [not mentioned by *Minchas Shay*] that the cantillation under מטָרף is a *f'vir*, which would connect it with בְּנֵי.

According to a Midrashic interpretation, the word עֲלִיתָ [have risen] has the connotation of: *You have become exalted*: By your conduct *vis-a-vis* the טָרַף, *the prey* — in the cases of Joseph and Tamar — עֲלִיתָ, *you have become exalted*.

Many commentators — e.g. *Rashbam*; *Radak*; *Chizkuni*; *Ibn Ezra* — do not interpret 'prey' as al-

49 from the prey, my son, you elevated yourself.
 10 He crouches, lies down like a lion,
 and like an awesome lion
 who dares rouse him?
 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah

luding to Joseph. They see the entire context of the verse as the development of Judah's power. He begins his career as a vigorous, strong cub, then he goes out to attack and defeat his prey. After he succeeds, he rises from the fray and settles down in the security of his cities like a crouching, relaxing adult lion with the metaphor of lion cub as alluding to Judah's general prowess.

Tur refers this to Judah's descendant David who first demonstrated his prowess by killing a lion and a bear [I Samuel 17:34 ff]. It was this act that imbued him with the courage to battle Goliath, as a result of which David rose to pre-eminence. Thus: *through prey* [the lion and bear] you [i.e. your descendant David] will rise to pre-eminence.

כָּרַע כִּבֵּץ בְּאֵרִיָּה וּכְלָבִיא מִי וְיִקְמוּנִי —
 He crouches, lies down like a lion;
 and like an awesome lion, who
 [dares] rouse him?

[The translation of כָּרַץ as *lies down* (peacefully) follows R' Hirsch on 4:7; see *comm.* there.]

[Rashi, continuing his interpretation of the syntax, follows the Midrash and interprets this phrase as Judah's reward for having held himself aloof from the prey: Your descendants will enjoy the tranquility that only a crouching lion, king of beasts, can experience for it

fears no other creature. No man will be able to budge Judah from his secure position.]

We are told that such was the case in the days of King Solomon [I Kings 5:5]: *And Judah and Israel dwelt in security, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.*

The Hebrew terms for lion, לָבִיא, and אֲרִיָּה, are essentially synonymous, but the former has a more mature, majestic and awesome connotation. According to *Avos d'Rabbi Nosson Version B* end of chapt. 43, לָבִיא, from לָב, heart, implies the fear a lion's roar strikes in the 'hearts' of other animals.

Targum Yonasan renders: 'He dwells quietly and in strength like a lion; and, like an old lion when he reposes — who may stir him up?'

Malbim punctuates the phrase differently, interpreting: כָּרַע כִּבֵּץ בְּאֵרִיָּה, וּכְלָבִיא, he kneels, rests, like a lion and like a mature lion — the kneeling refers to lion and resting to mature lion, — מִי וְיִקְמוּנִי, who will dare rouse him? No one would place himself in mortal danger by daring to rouse him. Similarly, your enemies will not dare provoke you.

10. לֹא יִסּוּר שֵׁבֶט מִיְּהוּדָה — *The scepter shall not depart from Judah.*

I.e., the privilege of providing Israel's sovereign ruler, who is symbolized by his possession of the royal scepter, shall not pass from the House of Judah (*Onkelos*).¹¹

[Reconciling this prophecy with

1. The Talmud [Yoma 53b] records that on Yom Kippur the High Priest uttered a short prayer, which, according to one opinion ended with the Aramaic equivalent of our passage: 'May a ruler not depart from the House of Judah.'

the historical facts that Saul, a Ben-jaminite, reigned before Judah's first king, David, assumed the throne, and that the Davidic dynasty ceased to reign after the destruction of the Temple, *Rashi* comments:) — This refers to the period from the ascension of the House of David [and thenceforth — even when the Jews would be in Exile (*Mizrachi*)]. It is an allusion to [not only kings *per se* but to whomever exercises dominion over Israel. Specifically, it alludes to Judah's descendants] the *רֹאשֵׁי לְלוּיָהוּ*, *Exilarchs* in Babylon, appointed by the civil authorities, who ruled the people with the 'rod,' meaning that they could use force, if necessary, to secure obedience [the word *שֵׁבֶט* means both *rod* and *scepter*]. [See *Sanhedrin* 5a; *Horayos* 11b].

Gur Aryeh gives two answers to the question of how Jacob's prophetic blessing could have become nullified in the many centuries when there has been no Jewish monarchy:

— The Patriarchal blessing meant that whenever Israel merits a legally constituted monarchy, the king will come from Judah, but Jacob never said that there would always be a Judean king.

— There have been periods in history when there was no king from Judah, as during the time of the Judges and under Saul, but these were temporary aberrations that were followed by a Davidic dynasty. Similarly, the current Exile will culminate in the Davidic reign of Messiah. The fact that the kingship always returns to Judah means that Jacob's testament is still binding. Only if the monarchy were to revert permanently from Judah could it be said that the tribe lost its hereditary right to the throne.

The intimation is that Jacob's promise applied even to periods when Israel had no king. Moreover, during the Second Commonwealth when the priestly Levite family of Hasmoneans occupied the throne, a descendant of David always held a position of leadership as head of the Sanhedrin, in fulfillment of this verse, as Yosef ben Gurion writes (*Abarbanel*). [See *ArtScroll* "Chanukah," history sect. p. 33ff.]

Compare *Rambam's Commentary to the Mishnah, Bechoros* 4:4:

The Exilarch was appointed in Babylon. He need not be a scholar and yeshiva head who was appointed in *Eretz Yisrael*, but it is proper that he be very great in Torah wisdom, so much so that when he is appointed there be none greater than him in any way in *Eretz Yisrael*... The authority of the Exilarch over all of Israel is the same as the authority of the monarchy, which can compel and enforce, as implied by the fact that the Torah calls him *שֵׁבֶט*, *rod*, and the Sages state: *The scepter* [i.e. *rod*] *shall not depart from Judah*, this refers to the Exilarchs of Babylon, who rule Israel with the 'rod,' i.e., with force and power. You should note that we do not require him to possess wisdom [although, as stated above, it is desirable that he be the leading scholar of the generation] but he must have the proper lineage [from the Davidic dynasty]... But the Heads of the Yeshivos of *Eretz Yisrael* (*רֹאשֵׁי יְשִׁיבוֹת אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל*) are [i.e., must be] scholars as it is written [in our verse] *וְקֹחֶקֶט מִבֵּין רִנְלִיּוֹ* *and a scholar from among his descendants*.

Although, as *Radak* notes, the *שֵׁבֶט*, *rod* or *scepter*, is technically symbolic of the monarchy since a king has the absolute power to punish his subjects as if with a rod, and kings held a scepter to symbolize this power, *R' Avraham ben HaRambam* maintains that not only *royalty* is meant by the figurative expression *scepter*, but *dominion* in general, as was wielded by the Exilarchs even after the monarchy ceased to exist [as *Rashi* and *Abarbanel* note above].

According to *Ibn Ezra*, *scepter* refers to greatness and pre-eminence in general, of the kind enjoyed by the tribe of Judah even before David reigned when it traveled at the head of the na-

tion in the desert [see *Numbers* 2:9] and after Joshua's death when Judah was ordered to lead the campaign to conquer *Eretz Yisrael* [*Judges* 1:2].

Ramban differs.

Ramban differs strongly, maintaining that *scepter* refers exclusively to royalty as evidenced by *Psalms* 45:7 and *Isaiah* 14:5, and does not refer to pre-eminence of the kind mentioned by *Ibn Ezra*.

Ramban emphasizes that the implication of Jacob's pronouncement is not that Judah's descendants would never be subjugated by other nations or that Judah would never lose the kingship, for indeed the nation would eventually go into exile, as foretold in *Deut.* 28:36, and be devoid of monarchy.

Rather, the intent is that as long as there is a monarchy in Israel, the king will be from Judah and none of his brothers will rule him. In this way Jacob bequeathed sovereignty to Judah, as David mentions in *I Chronicles* 28:4.

Ramban continues that by the expression *לֹא יִסּוּר*, *shall not depart*, Jacob was alluding to the fact that another tribe [Benjamin, tribe of Saul the first king of Israel] would initially rule over Israel; but once the scepter of monarchy passed to Judah's line [i.e., to David, Judah's descendant] it was not to *depart* to any other tribe.^[1] The kings from other tribes who ruled Israel after

David violated Jacob's testament and were punished accordingly [see *Hoshea* 8:4].

Similarly, the Hasmoneans who ruled in the time of the Second Temple were punished and fell by their enemies' swords. Though they were very pious, and were it not for them Torah and the observance of the Commandments would have been forgotten in Israel, they sinned by assuming the monarchy though they were not of the tribe of Judah [they were Priests of the tribe of Levi] and were thereby guilty of causing the 'scepter' to depart from Judah. Additionally, they were punished since, as *Kohanim* who should be wholly devoted to the Service of God, there was an extra stricture against their reign [see *Numbers* 18:7]. Even in cases where it might be necessary for Israel to appoint a king over itself from the other tribes, such a person should not be anointed as royal monarch, but should function merely as a judge or official [see *Yerushalmi Horayos* 3:2].

Rambam [*Hil. Melachim* 1:9] similarly maintains that this verse was not merely a *foretelling of future developments by the Patriarch*, but a *command* which vested the tribe of Judah with royalty; accordingly sovereignty from any tribe other than Judah was considered an act of usurpation.

1. Saul — temporary monarch.

In a dissertation fundamental to an understanding of the concept of the monarchy in Israel, *Ramban* discusses why Saul was appointed first king of Israel.

Briefly, *Ramban* asserts that the people's request for a monarchy was displeasing to God at that time since Samuel was their judge and prophet and was effectively leading them according to God's Word and winning their battles. Accordingly, the people's request for a king was perceived as a rejection of God Himself [see *I Samuel* 8:7].

For this reason, though God acquiesced to their request for a king, He granted them only a temporary monarchy, which He later removed in His wrath. [See the allusion in *Hoshea* 13:11]. He did not wish to appoint a king over them from the tribe of Judah to whom royalty belonged and from whom it was never to depart. Had Saul not sinned, he would have retained sovereignty over *part* of Israel, perhaps over the tribes that were descended from his mother [Rachel, namely Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh], or he might have been a vassal king, subject to the king of Judah.

ויחי מט/א שֶׁבֶט מִיְהוּדָה וּמַחֲקֵק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו עַד כִּי יָבֹא שִׁילֹה וְלוֹ יִקְהֶת עַמִּים: אֲסֻרֵי לִגְפָן

According to *Tosafos*, *Yoma* 26a, this passage was intended as a blessing, and its effects were only partially achieved because of the unworthiness of certain descendants of the Davidic line [see *II Samuel* 7; *Drashos HaRan* 87; *Abarbanel*].

R' *Ashtur* in *Midrashei HaTorah* maintains that 'although his kingship will depart as a result of his sins, it will not be a permanent departure, for kingship will return to his line with the coming of the Messiah.'

Nor [lit. and] scholars from among his descendants [lit. between his feet; compare the metaphor in *Deut.* 28:57 (*Radak*)].

Following *Rashi*: A reference to the Torah scholars [מַחֲקֵק being derived from חָק, law, an allusion to the Torah (*Be'er Yitzchak*)] — the *Nesi'im*, princes, of *Eretz Yisrael* [who descended from the line of Judah].

This is derived from *Sanhedrin* 5a, which explains this phrase as alluding to 'Hillel's descendants [in *Eretz Yisrael*] who teach Torah to the multitudes.' Thanks to their descent from the Davidic dynasty, they enjoyed immense prestige both at home and abroad.

Ibn Ezra interprets מַחֲקֵק [from חָקק, inscribe] as scribe [i.e., a disciple who inscribes the Law], while *Radak* explains the term as a reference to rulers who are legislators.

The metaphor of *between his feet*, according to *Ibn Ezra*, depicts the scribe who sits at the feet of the ruler.

Radak in *Shorashim* interprets like *Ibn Ezra*, and explains our passage: 'The rule shall not depart from Judah nor the scribe sitting at his feet.' [Thus, the scribes are not descendants of Judah, but are other Jews who are subservient to Judah.]

Radak, in his commentary to *Genesis*, however, explains *from between his feet* as a metaphor for descendants.

Comp. *Onkelos*: '... Nor scribes from his children's children forever.'

— Whoever will have position and power will come from the tribe of Judah. He will give rise to the heads of the academies, and to rabbis who have authority in questions of law, and most members of the Sanhedrin will be from Judah. In every generation there will be people who have access to kings and who are respected by governments. These people will generally descend from Judah. In every generation there will be someone from the tribe of Judah exercising power and authority (*Sh'lah*; R' *Bachya*; cf. *Me'am Loez*; *Abarbanel*).

— עַד כִּי יָבֹא שִׁילֹה — *Until Shiloh arrives* [lit. until when Shiloh shall come].

Torah source for the belief in the Messiah.

The general consensus [with few exceptions] of Rabbinic interpretation is that this phrase refers to the coming of the Messiah. This passage accordingly constitutes the primary Torah source for the belief that the Messiah will come. In the Middle Ages the wisest dignitaries of Jewish communities always made reference to this passage when they had to engage in debates with the ecclesiastics of the other religions.

Onkelos renders: Until the Messiah comes, to whom the kingdom belongs.

Rashi concurs and similarly comments: Until the King Messiah will come — שְׁמֹכִלְכָה שָׁלוֹ, to whom the kingdom belongs. According to the

*nor a scholar from among his descendants,
until Shiloh arrives
and his will be an assemblage of nations.*

Midrash, שילה is a composite of שיל, a gift to him — a reference to King Messiah to whom all peoples will bring gifts. See *Isaiah* 18:7; *Psalms* 76:12.

Sforno relates the etymology of this word to שלח, the root of שלוח and שלום, happiness and peace, depicting the definitive character of the Messiah's mission which will usher in an era of peace and universal harmony. He would render: *Until [the final] tranquility arrives.*

Midrash Tanchuma preserves an opinion that שילה is derived from שליה, little child [lit. the amniotic sac in which the fetus is formed; comp. *Deut.* 28:57]. Thus, the passage means: *Until his scion [i.e. Messiah] comes.* [The intimation is that the Messiah will not be a Divine being, but will be one who will be born into the world normally like mortal men.]

It is manifestly clear that the Rabbis who interpret the allusion in this passage as referring to the Messiah do not imply that the word עַד, until [the coming of the Messiah] intimates that Judah's sovereignty will end when the Messiah arrives. Rather, the Messiah — who will be a descendant of Judah through the line of David — is perceived as the pinnacle of Judah's sovereignty, one in whom the sovereignty will reach its greatest glory, the culmination of Jacob's blessing to Judah. [See Overview to ArtScroll *Ruth*.]

Thus, the phraseology of the blessing: עַד כִּי יָבֹא שִׁילָה 'until' Shiloh comes, has the sense of 'peaking' with the coming of the Messiah. The meaning is that the scepter will never depart from Judah, but will be fully realized

when the Messiah comes. This is similar to God's promise to Jacob in 28:15, *I will not forsake you 'until' I have done what I have spoken about you*, which was an assurance that God would never forsake him (*Shlah; Teshuvos HaRashba* 4:187; *Abarbanel*).

Another interpretation of the passage is that of *Rashbam*: Judah's privilege of sovereignty over his eleven brothers will last only עַד כִּי יָבֹא שִׁילָה, until he comes to [the city of] Shiloh. That is, until the King of Judah, Rehoboam, son of Solomon, will come to establish the monarchy at Shiloh — which is near Shechem, as is evident from *I Kings* 12:1; *II Chron.* 10:1 (comp. context of *Joshua* chapt. 24). It was then that the Ten Tribes seceded and crowned Jeroboam, leaving Rehoboam with only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. וְלֹא יִקְרָא עִמָּם, and to him [i.e., Rehoboam] shall belong the assemblage of nations, the nations that remained loyal to the memory of Rehoboam's father, Solomon. [See *Torah Sheleimah* for many other Midrashic interpretations; also *R' Bachya* who refers this to the Egyptian Redemption through Moses; *Chizkuni* who refers it to Ahijah the Shilonite; *Ralbag* — to David. Nevertheless, the overwhelming consensus of Rabbinic commentary interprets the verse to allude to the Messiah.]

וְלֹא יִקְרָא עִמָּם — *And his will be an assemblage of nations.*

The translation of יִקְרָא as a noun — *assemblage* — follows *Rashi*, the reference being to all the people who will assemble to pay him [the Messiah] homage. Cf. *Isaiah* 11:10: *Unto him shall all the nations seek* [see below].

— Until the Messiah's coming

Judah will hold the royal scepter in the midst of his own nation, but the Messiah, descendant of David, will reign over the gathered nations (R' Munk).

Rashi explains that the word יִקְחֶהָ could not be a third person future verb of the root קָחָה, with the meaning of 'he will ...', for if so the verb should have agreed with the plural subject עַמִּים, nations, and the phrase should have read יִקְחֶהָ עַמִּים, 'and to him the nations (plural) will ...'. Rather, the term is a noun of the root יָקָה, which Rashi interprets as meaning *assemble*, the י being part of the root. A word of similar construction is יִפְתָּךְ [Ezekiel 28:17] which is also not a verb but a noun, (from the root יָפַע) meaning *your brightness*.

In a grammatical note, Rashi continues that the root letter י of יָקָה is sometimes omitted, and therefore our passage could also have read יִקְחֶהָ עַמִּים instead of יִקְחֶהָ while retaining the same meaning. Many root letters are subject to this grammatical rule, technically known as עִקָּר נִוּקַל, 'Root letters that are omitted.' Examples are the נ of נָוָה and נָשָׁךְ (which in future tense are נִוָּה and נִשְׁכָּךְ), and the א of אָסַף (which sometimes is conjugated as אִסַּף).

Ramban agrees that יִקְחֶהָ is to be interpreted as a noun, but maintains that it derives from the root קָחָה meaning *weaken*, *collapse*, the י being similar to the function of the י in the word יִקְחֶהָ, oil [which indicates it as the noun form of יָקָה]. He renders: 'And his [i.e. Messiah's] shall be the weakening of peoples' — that is, he shall vanquish them and reign supreme. Following this interpretation, the sense would be that the rod of the oppressors shall not be removed from Judah until the coming of his descendant, the Messiah — who will bring about the weakness of peoples and their collapse — since he will subjugate them. Comp. the expression in the Passover Haggadah [from Mechilta Bo] הִקְדָּה אֶת שִׁנָּיו 'weaken [i.e. blunt] his teeth' by your sharp response.

According to Radak, the root יָקָה

means *obedience and acceptance of authority*, denoting that, *To him will be the obedience of the nations*, for they will be subservient to him. 'Such was the case with David; how much more so with the King Messiah.'

Onkelos similarly renders: Unto whom shall be the obedience of the nations.

11. אֶסְרִי לִפְנֵי עִירָה וְלִשְׁרָקָה בְּנֵי אֶתְנֹו — He will tie [lit. = אָסַר, ties] his donkey to the vine; to the vine-branch his donkey's foal.

In early Biblical times the donkey was the usual animal for riding — even for persons of rank. See above 22:3, Judges 5:10; 10:4 (Ibn Caspi).

Having prophesied about Judah's personal greatness and that of his offspring, Jacob now turns to prophesy about Judah's territory. [Though Jacob could not reveal the 'End' to his sons, he did provide them with tiny glimpses of what the Messianic era would hold in store (Abarbanel).]

He draws an idyllic picture of how Judah's district would be productive and flow with wine like a fountain. Its vines would be so productive that a man would tie a donkey to a vine since a single vine will require a donkey to carry its grapes; similarly from the vintage of only a single branch of a vine one will load up a foal (Rashi; Rashbam; R' Avraham ben HaRambam).

Ibn Ezra explains that the vintage will be so abundant that one will bind his donkey to a vine, unconcerned whether it eats the grapes.

There is the further connotation that the vines will be so sturdy that one would be able to securely tether a donkey to them (Haamek Davar).

¹¹ He will tie his donkey to the vine;
to the vine branch his donkey's foal.

Onkelos also refers our passage to the Era of the Messiah, but interpretively renders the passage as a metaphor. He offers dual symbolism: (a): Israel shall pass round about in his [i.e. the Messiah's] city; the people shall build his Temple; (b) they will be righteous all around him, and fulfill the Torah through his teachings.

Rashi explains *Onkelos'* symbolisms as follows: in the first interpretation, *וְנָס, the vine*, symbolizes Israel, see *Psalms* 80:9: *You have caused a 'vine' to journey out of Israel*; *עֵזֶר* [in the literal context from the root *עָזַר, donkey*, but metaphorically derived from *עִיר, city*] alludes to Jerusalem; *וְנָס, vine branch*, alludes to Israel [cf. *Jeremiah* 2:21]: *I had planted you a vine branch*; *בְּנֵי אָדָם* is an allusion to the building [בְּנֵי=builders (cf. *Berachos* 64a *אֵל תִּקְרִי בְּנֵיךָ אֶלֶּא בְּנֵיךָ, read not your sons but your builders*)] of his [the Messiah's] Temple, the term *אֵתְרָן* being symbolically related to the term *הַיְתָרָן* being *Entry Gate* of the Temple mentioned in *Ezekiel* 40:15. Furthermore, *Onkelos* interprets *אָסַר* (bind; tether) in the sense of the Aramaic go round about.

In *Onkelos'* second interpretation the vine alludes to the righteous; *בְּנֵי אָדָם* to those who — riding on white donkeys (See *Judges* 5:10) — occupy themselves with the dissemination of Torah [this follows the exegesis in *Eruvin* 54b where that verse from *Judges* is interpreted to refer to the scholars

who ride from city to city and from district to district to teach the Torah, thus making the explanation of Torah 'shining-white' as the light at noon].

Sforno follows the interpretation that the allusion in the verse is to the Messiah, and perceives in this blessing signs by which he will be recognized: He will be revealed on a donkey as the Prophet [*Zechariah* 9:9] writes: *humble, riding on a donkey; on a donkey foaled by a she-donkey*. That the Messiah is not depicted as arriving upon a horse ready for battle is because the wars against the gentile nations and the downfall of their kingdoms will already have been accomplished by God Almighty, and the Messiah will reign in peace. Secondly, the donkey tethered to the vine symbolizes how his kingdom of peace will dwell amidst Israel, a nation compared by the Rabbis to a vine [*Chullin* 92a]: *For the vineyard of HASHEM of Legions is the House of Israel*.⁽¹⁾

The words *אָסַר* and *בְּנֵי* have a superfluous *י* and are to be interpreted as if they were spelled *אָסֵר* and *בְּנֵי* respectively. Similar forms are *מְקִימֵי* [=מְקִימֵי] and *הַיְשֻׁבִּי* [=הַיְשֻׁבִּי] in *Psalms* 113. [Cf. also *רְבִיתִי* (=רִבִּית) in *Lament*. 1:1] (*Rashi*).⁽²⁾

The translation of *שָׂרָקָה* follows *Rashi* who interprets it as a long branch; runner; *coriere* in Old French.

1. *R' Hirsch* similarly observes how Jacob visualizes the Messiah, conqueror of humanity, not on a steed, but on a young donkey. The donkey is the beast of burden that always represents peace, well-being, and national greatness, whereas the steed represents military might. Accordingly, the Jewish conception of royal power is not represented by the number of horses, and it is forbidden for the king to accumulate many horses [*Deut.* 17:16].

Consequently the future Redeemer of Jewry and humanity appears here in connection with the donkey, symbolizing the twofold vision of peace and material well-being. For to tie up his animal and especially *עֵזֶר*, a donkey's frisky colt, to the vine, implies a greatly increased development of nature (the vine being as strong as a tree) and extraordinary abundance. This is how the prophet *Zachariah* visualized the coming of the Messiah: *Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion, shout with joy O daughter of Jerusalem! Look how your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, humbly riding upon a donkey upon the colt of a donkey* (9:9).

2. Citing the *Zohar*, *R' Munk* writes that the name of God is alluded to twice in this verse. The letter *י* as a suffix to the verb *אָסַר*, and the letter *ה*, written in place of a modifier of the word *עֵזֶר*, form the Name *יהי*. And this name is constituted once more by the letter *י*, the suffix on the word *בְּנֵי*, with the letter *ה*, suffix of *שָׂרָקָה* (the usual form, as in *Jeremiah* 2:21). This double allusion is to remind us that the mission of the true Messiah will be accomplished only 'when God is recognized as King over all the earth.'

ויחי מטיב יב לבשו וברם-ענבים סותה: חכלילי עינים מיין ולבן-שנים מחלב:

Ibn Janach and Radak in Shorashim s.v. שרש explain the term as referring to the choicest kind of grape vines, known in Arabic as s'rik, while Ibn Ghayyat refers it to a choice vine that bears seedless grapes. Targum and Rashi to Isaiah 5:2 and Jeremiah 2:21 also interpret it as a choice vine.

He will launder [lit. has laundered (this is known as "prophetic past tense" in which a future event is depicted as if it had already occurred)] his garment in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes.

These phrases continue the hyperbole of the abundance of wine (*Rashi*). So productive will Judah's vineyards be that he will figuratively be able to use wine even for washing his garments. [Comp. the hyperbole in *Job* 29:6.]

— Grapes will be so abundant that wine will figuratively run down the hillsides and garments will become soaked with wine (*Ralbag*).

— This continues the poetic metaphor in the previous phrase: After treading the abundant vintage of grapes, his garments will be stained. Comp. *Isaiah* 63:2: *Why is your clothing red, and your garment like one who treads in a winepress?* He will then have to wash them of the wine (*Rashbam*).

Onkelos interpretively renders: His garments will be of fine purple, as though washed in wine.

Following the prophetic interpretation of this verse as alluding to

the Messianic Era, *Sforno* perceives this verse as depicting how the Messiah will figuratively wash his garment in the blood of his enemies.

— The Messiah will do battle with those who oppose him, and slaughter those who come to attack him. The mountains will run red with the blood of the dead, and the uniforms of the Messiah's troops will be drenched as if soaked in red wine (*Zohar; Targum Yonasan*).^[1]

Comp. *Lekach Tov*: This alludes to the retribution which the Holy One, Blessed be He, will bring on Edom [i.e. Rome; a reference to the Fourth Kingdom under whom Israel will be in Exile prior to the Messianic redemption], as it says (*Isaiah* 63:1): *Who is this coming from Edom in crimsoned garments from Bozrah? ... Why is your clothing so red, your garments like his who treads grapes? ... I trod them down in My anger ... their life-blood bespattered My garments and all My clothing was stained, for I had planned a day of vengeance, and My year of redemption arrived.*

In accordance with the Messianic allusions in this verse, the Talmud [*Berachos* 57a] records that he who sees a vine stem in a dream may look forward to the Messiah.

The translation of סותה [=סורו] as robe follows *Rashi* who explains that it refers to a kind of garment; this is the only place the term appears throughout Scripture.

Rashi writes further that *Onkelos* renders

1. However, *R' Bachya* notes that in Judah's blessing one finds every letter of the *aleph beth* except for the letter *zayin*. The word *zayin* means *weapon*, and the absence of this letter indicates that the the Judaic kingdom will win its ultimate victory not with weapons, or through natural means, but by the merit of the Word of God. This is further indicated by Judah's name יהודה, which contains the Four-Letter Name of God, indicating that the foundation of Judah's reign is in compliance with the will of God, not physical force or weaponry.

49 He will launder his garments in wine
12 and his robe in the blood of grapes.

12 Red-eyed from wine,
and white-toothed from milk.

the term as *colored* garments, basing himself on the fact that such garments are worn to *allure and entice*, from the root סוּח, as in the word מְסִית, *one who entices to idolatry*. Comp. this interpretation of the root in *Kesubos* 111b.

R' Shmuel ben Chofni Gaon [whose opinion is cited anonymously by *Ibn Ezra*] suggests that the definition of *garment* intimates that the word סוּח is an elliptic form of the word for garment, כְּסוּת.

סוּח is synonymous with סוּח. That it is spelled with a ה [the numerical equivalent of which is 5] alludes to the five garments which Judah wore [see *Bereishis Rabbah* 93:7] (*Midrash* cited in *Torah comm.* of R' Yitzchak of Vienna). [See *Zohar* cited in footnote.]

12 חִבְלֵי עֵינָיִם מִיַּיִן וְלִבְנֵי שָׁנָיִם מִחֶלֶב — Red-eyed from wine, and white-toothed from milk.

This verse continues the metaphor of the abundant vintage and grazing land in Judah's region:

— There will be redness of eyes from the abundance of wine and there will be whiteness of teeth from the abundance of milk. The expression 'redness of eyes' is associated with the drinking of wine because one who drinks wine gets red eyes. [The מ of מִיַּיִן is not the comparative prefix meaning *redder* than wine, but indicates *red-eyed from wine*.] That milk will be abundant is proof that Judah will have sufficient pasture land to support large flocks (*Rashi*).

Rashi continues that *Onkelos* in-

terprets the verse figuratively in two ways: (a) *His mountains* ['eyes' metaphorically referring to lofty mountains from which one can gaze from afar] *red with wine*, (b) *his fountains* [taking עֵינָיִם in the sense of מְצָנִין, *well-spring*] i.e., his winepress and vats *flowing with wine*; his *valleys* [שָׁנָיִם; see *Rashi* to *Exod.* 14:2] *white with grain and with flocks of sheep*.⁽¹⁾

Radak interprets עֵינָיִם as *appearance* [comp. *Rashi* to *Exod.* 10:5]: His appearance will be ruddy from wine. The entire verse is a hyperbole.

R' Saadia Gaon also renders עֵינָיִם as *appearance*, but perceives the מ of מִיַּיִן as comparative. He accordingly renders: *Ruddier* [more robust; sparkling] in appearance than wine, and teeth whiter than milk.

— I.e., he is a man of regal appearance and suitable for royalty, as it says of David [1 Samuel 16:12]: *Now he was ruddy, with fine eyes and good looking* (B'chor Shor).

— The generation of the Messiah will be brilliant, glowing with vitality — with sparkling eyes and physical vigor, and teeth whiter than milk (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

The translation of חִבְלֵי as denoting *redness* follows *Rashi* who cites the similar word חִבְלֵי לֵוִי in *Proverbs* 23:29.

[Apparently *Rashi* interprets the word as an adjectival noun in the construct form, synonymous with חִבְלֵי, the suffix י being superfluous like the י in the words מִקְדָּשִׁי and נָיִן in v. 11 above.]

The root is חָבַל, *red*. The double ל emphasizes the intensity of the redness (*Yohel Or*).

1. The Sages in *Kesubos* 111b perceive the homiletical inference of this passage to refer to Israel's plea for God's graciousness. Israel says: A friendly look in God's 'eyes' [an anthropomorphic expression denoting God's beneficence] is more pleasant than wine, and His 'smile' is more pleasant than milk.

R' Yochanan said, 'The person who "makes his teeth white" [by smiling affectionately] to his friend is better than one who gives him milk to drink. Do not read מִחֶלֶב שָׁנָיִם מִחֶלֶב, and teeth white from milk, but מִחֶלֶב שָׁנָיִם מִחֶלֶב, [showing] the whiteness of teeth [is better] than milk.

ויחי מט"י יג זבולן לחוף ימים ישכון והוא לחוף אג"ת יזכרתו על-צידן:

Ramban also cites the word in Proverbs. He suggests, however, that contextually חקלילי, has the same meaning as חקלילי, paint, the letters חק and חל being transposed. Thus, he renders: *His eyes shall be as though rouged with wine.*

13. Zebulun.

Having given a glimpse of the Messianic era and finding in Judah a fitting leader of the future house of Jewry, the Patriarch turns to his other children. He bestows his blessings, assigning to each according to his particular aptitudes his role in the harmony of the twelve tribes (*Abarbanel*).

Until this point, the Patriarch mentioned the children in the order of their birth. Now, although Dan, Naftali, and Gad were next in seniority, Jacob skipped to Issachar and Zebulun because they were sons of Leah, like the four oldest. He wished to conclude them as a unit before continuing with the sons of the maidservants (*Moshav Zekeinim*).

✽ Zebulun precedes Issachar.

Issachar was older than Zebulun, yet Jacob gave the latter precedence, because [as *Rashi* notes below], Zebulun engaged in commerce, and supported Issachar who studied Torah. Issachar's Torah-learning was made possible by Zebulun, and Zebulun was therefore accorded honor as if he were the elder, and blessed first (*Tanchuma*; cf. *Ibn Ezra*).

זבולן לחוף ימים ישכון — Zebulun shall settle [dwell] by the seashore.

I.e., his territory shall be by the 'border' of the sea. The term לחוף [lit. to the border (i.e. shore)] is syn-

onymous with על חוף, upon [or by] the border (*Rashi*).

And so it was when the land of Canaan was later divided among the tribes, Zebulun's territory was between the Sea of Kinneret and the Mediterranean (*Akeidas Yitzchak*).

Zebulun's exact territory is delineated in *Joshua* 19:10ff. See *comm.* to ArtScroll ed.

The Talmud [*Megillah* 6a] records that Zebulun complained to the Holy One, Blessed is He, that his territory consisting of seashore and hills was inferior to the fertile fields of his brothers. Therefore God reassured him with the knowledge that in his waters will be found the *chilazon* [a much sought-after small, rare fish from which the purple *t'cheles* dye for the *tzitzis* was extracted], and the popular *taris* [*Rashi*: tunny fish]; and furthermore, Zebulun was assured that from his sands would be made the colorless glass [which was a source of wealth in ancient times].

Zebulun was thus blessed that he would live near seaports and engage in transporting his merchandise by ships to distant seaports where he would sell it at great profit.

והוא לחוף אג"ת — And he shall be at the ships' harbor [lit. shore].

I.e., [since his territory will border the seashore] he [i.e., Zebulun] will constantly be at the port, where the ships bring merchandise. Moses alluded to the Issachar-Zebulun partnership when he said [*Deut.* 33:18]: *Rejoice Zebulun in your going out, and Issachar in your tents.* Zebulun went forth to trade, while Issachar studied Torah in the tents (*Rashi* from *Tanchuma*; see *Rashi* to *ישב אהלים* 25:27).

— Accordingly, Zebulun was accorded priority over Issachar who was older because המעשה גדול

49 ¹³ Zebulun shall settle by the seashore.
13 He shall be at the ships' harbor,
and his last border will reach Zidon.

יִתְרָה מִן הַעוֹשָׂה, one who motivates others to accomplish is greater than one who accomplishes (Tanchuma; Mizrahi).⁽¹⁾

Nachalas Yitzchak perceives Zebulun's territory rather than Zebulun himself to be the subject of this phrase. He renders: *Zebulun shall settle by the seashore, and it — i.e., his territory — shall become a haven for ships, with its extreme province at Zidon.*

וְיִרְכָּתוֹ עַל-צִידוֹן — And his last border [lit. flank; thigh] will reach [lit. is upon] Zidon.

I.e., it will extend close to Zidon (Rashi).

Zidon was famed for its commerce. Cf. *Isaiah 23:2* (Rashbam).

Zidon [now Saida] was a city between Tyre and Beirut, bordering the Mediterranean. It was the northwest boundary of Canaan. (See above 10:19) At one time it was apparently the dominant Phoenician city, but its hegemony later passed over to Tyre.

Since the well-known Zidon was actually in Asher's territory the Sages in the *Midrash* variously identify the Zidon in this verse with other lesser-known cities by similar names.

The *Vilna Gaon* maintains, however, that the Zidon in Asher's territory is referred to. In his comm. to *Joshua*

19:14, he explains that the implication of our verse is that Zebulun's territory bisected that of Asher to the north of him, and he had a land corridor, in the shape of a thigh-bone as it were, hugging the Mediterranean coast and extending to Zidon.

According to *Yafeh Toar* the implication is that Zebulun's extreme border will be near Zidon. However, Zidon itself will be in Asher's portion.

The translation of יִרְכָּתוֹ [lit. flank; hind part] as last border follows *Rashi* who explains that in this context the term denotes end, as in *Exod. 26:22* וְלִירְכָתִי הַמִּשְׁכָּן, and for the ends of the Tabernacle. Thus *Rashi* avoids the possible misinterpretation that flank in the literal sense refers physically to Zebulun's body (*Devek Tov*).

The term is derived from the root יִרְכָּה, hindmost part, extremity, not from the cognate root יִרְךָ, thigh (*Ibn Caspi*).

Kli Yakar suggests that thigh connotes commerce which supports a person as a thigh supports the torso; he renders: *his commerce will extend to Zidon.*

14. Issachar.

[The Patriarch proceeds to bless the last of Leah's sons, Issachar. Although the simile of *strong-boned donkey* and the references to *land* seem to denote an allusion to agricultural pursuit — a view indeed expressed by one Sage in the *Midrash* and followed by several commentators — *Rashi* favors the traditional

1. *Sforno* elaborates: Jacob gave Zebulun the merchant precedence over Issachar the scholar and Moses did the same in his blessing (*Deut. 33:18*). It is impossible to engage in Torah study unless one first has his material necessities, as the Sages said, 'If there is no flour there is no Torah.' Whenever someone assists his friend by providing his needs so that he can study Torah as Zebulun did, the service of God performed through the efforts of the scholar will be attributed to both of them. This is why the Torah instructed Israel to give gifts to *Kohanim* and *Levites*, so that the entire nation could have a share in those who uphold the Torah — for the *Kohanim* and *Levites* have the responsibility to study and teach Torah. Thereby all Jews will earn a share of the World to Come, as it is taught, All Israel has a share in the World to Come.

וי יִשְׁשַׁכָּר חֲמֹר גָּרָם רֵכֶז בֵּין הַמְשַׁפְּתִים: ייחי מט"ד

Rabbinic interpretation that Jacob's blessing reflects Issachar's *spiritual* role as *bearer of the yoke of Torah* and cultivator of the spiritual treasures of the People. As noted above, Issachar devoted his time to Torah study and was supported by his brother Zebulun. Moses, too, alluded to this in his blessing (Deut. 33:28): *Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out* (i.e. in your commerce), and *Issachar in your tents* (i.e. in your pursuit of Torah-study).

[A Biblical reference to Issachar's later emergence in a major role in the spiritual life of the People occurs in I Chron. 12:32 where the descendants of Issachar are described as *understanding the times to know what Israel must do; their leaders numbered two hundred, and all their brothers were at their pronouncement*. The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 87:2:5) expounds this verse:

Understanding the times — means that the scholars of Issachar had either an understanding of the seasons or of the science of intercalation (i.e. the adding of a month during lunar leap years);

their leaders numbered two hundred — denotes that the tribe of Issachar produced two hundred heads of the Sanhedrin;

all their brothers were at their pronouncement — means that Issachar's rulings were accepted as authoritative, the other tribes agreed to the *halachah* as pronounced by Issachar and he instructed them as though his words were a *halachah* given to Moses at Sinai.

[The esteem in which the tribe of Issachar was held for its proficiency in Torah, according to the Midrash, is further demonstrated by the fact that

although Issachar was Jacob's ninth son, his tribal prince was the *second* to bring an offering for the dedication of the altar (Num. 7:18-23). *Esther Rabbah* 4 records that the wise men consulted by Ahasuerus [Esther 1:13] were people of Issachar.

[Furthermore, the greatness of Issachar in matters of Torah law was so profound that the Talmudic Sage Rava (in *Yoma* 26a) declared that there was not to be found a rabbinic scholar who decided halachic matters who was not a descendant of Levi or Issachar. (The intent, according to *Yafeh Toar*, is that though the tribe of Judah was numerically predominant in the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, the members of Levi and Issachar were the most prominent in interpreting individual questions of halachah for their brethren).

[Jacob's allusions to the *land* are perceived in the Midrash and *Zohar* to refer to the Torah of which it says: *The measure thereof is longer than the earth* (Job 11:9). Following a more literal interpretation of the allusion to *land*, however, some views in the Midrash and commentators infer from our verse that at least some people from Issachar worked the land in addition to their Torah study — a combination of Torah being combined with a wordly pursuit (see *Avos* 2:2). These various views will be synthesized in the commentary that follows.]

יִשְׁשַׁכָּר חֲמֹר גָּרָם — *Issachar is a strong-boned donkey.*

Like a sturdy donkey capable of bearing a heavy load, Issachar can bear the heavy burden of Torah study (*Rashi* from *Tanchuma*).⁽¹⁾ (2)

1. As noted in the *comm.* to 30:16, the Sages [*Niddah* 31a and Midrash to our verse] perceive another implication of this passage to be: *As for Issachar, a donkey was instrumental* [as if vowelized גָּרָם, *caused*]. The reference is to the episode in chapt. 30 when Rachel gave Leah the right to spend the evening with Jacob in exchange for the *dudaim*. When Jacob rode home from the field, Leah knew of his arrival only because his donkey brayed loudly and headed toward her tent where she intercepted him and told him of her arrangement with Rachel. As a result of this encounter, Jacob spent that night with Leah, and Issachar was conceived.

49 ¹⁴ **Issachar is a strong-boned donkey;**
14 **he rests between the boundaries.**

גָּרָם is an Aramaic term meaning *bone*, hence the connotation of *strong-boned*, *sturdy* (*Ibn Caspi*).

The phrase is elliptical and should be understood as if it read *הָמוֹר בֵּעַל גָּרָם* (*Mizrachi*).

R' Hirsch distinguishes between the terms *גָּרָם* and *עָצָם*. He explains the latter to mean *bone* in general, the *גָּרָם* of our verse means *limb and joint*, the bones that perform the moving, working function of a lever.

רִבֵּץ בֵּין הַמְּשָׁפְתִים — *He rests* [lit. *crouches*] *between the boundaries*.

— Like a donkey roaming day and night that cannot rest in its stable, but has to lie down on the road between the boundaries of the cities to which it carries merchandise (*Rashi*).

The allusion is to the Torah Sages who toil day and night in their studies and know no formal rest, but are spiritually tranquil (*Shaarei Aharon*).

The Sages in the Midrash interpret this as a poetic description of the disciples who sit on the ground before the Sages, imbibing Torah-learning.

Sforno translates *מְשָׁפְתִים* as *dual burdens* and interprets the reference to the strong-boned donkey which takes its rest 'between its packs,' i.e., while its burden and saddlebags are still upon it. Similarly, Issachar

will toil restlessly, simultaneously bearing the burdens of Torah study, an occupation, and communal service, as befits a wise man who is well-rounded in intellect and character.

The above views follow the familiar Rabbinic interpretation, whereby the tribe of Issachar — supported by Zebulun — was noted for its role as Torah scholar and cultivator of the spiritual treasures of the nation [see below]. There are views in the Midrash — followed by many commentators who stress the simple sense of Scripture — that our passage implies that Issachar spent at least some of his time working the land. As R' Hirsch notes [see footnote next verse], Issachar's study of Torah — his primary goal — was combined in a worldly pursuit.

B'chor Shor [similarly, *Rashbam*], following this 'literal' sense, interprets our verse and contrasts the 'strong-boned' Issachar — who was physically endowed for agricultural work — with Zebulun who engaged in maritime trade. The metaphor reflects how Issachar, the farmer, would spend even his leisure time between the boundaries of his properties, guarding his fields.

— Between city boundaries tilling his fields (*Rashbam*).

Or, according to *Abarbanel*: between the furrows of the soil, tilling it.

2. When Moses blessed Zebulun and Issachar he added [*Deut. 33:10*]: *עַמִּים הָר יִקְרְאוּ*, *they shall call people to the Mountain*.

Rashi, based on the Midrash, explains the phrase in these terms: To trade with Zebulun, merchants from many parts of the world will come into his territory while he remains at the border. Then they will say, 'having come this far, let us continue to Jerusalem [i.e., the Temple Mount] to see how the God of Israel is worshipped, and what He has done.' When they will see all Jewry worshipping one God and following the same kashruth laws — unlike heathen nations, each of which worships a different deity — they will be inspired to say, 'There is no people as pure as this,' and they will become converts there, as it is written [*ibid.*]: *שָׁם יִקְחוּ*, *there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness*.

According to R' Acha in the Midrash, the conversion of these foreigners will be a direct result of their admiration for the tribe of Issachar, which prospered though it devoted itself to the spiritual life of Torah. Accordingly, the intimation of *יִשְׁאָר הָמוֹר גָּרָם* is that *Issachar is a donkey for 'gerim'*, proselytes [i.e. in the sense that, like a donkey delivering his load, Issachar is a proselyte-bearing donkey, bringing them to Judaism. (*Gerim* in this Midrashic context is a play on words of the Hebrew verb *garem*.)]

ויחי טו וירא מנחה כי טוב ואת-הארץ כי
מט/טו-טז נעמה ויט שכמו לסבל ויהי למס
טז עבד: הן ידיו עמו כאחד

15. — [And] he saw tranquility that it was good. — וירא מנחה כי טוב.

He realized that his territory was a blessed land. [The word מנחה (lit. rest) alludes to the land where he found tranquility; comp. the connotation of the term מנחה as land in Deut. 12:9 אל המנוחה ואל-הנחלה to the 'tranquility' and to the inheritance (Rashbam)] (Rashi; Onkelos).

He saw that the tranquility of living on his land was better than travel to far-off places (Rashbam).

[This verse — like the others in this chapter — is phrased in the 'prophetic past' tense, which depicts the future as if it had already occurred.]

According to the Midrash, tranquility is an allusion to Torah doctrine, which is also described as טוב, good [Prov. 4:2]. [See Radak below.]

ואת-הארץ כי נעמה — And the land that it was pleasant.

— I.e., suitable for bearing fruit (Rashi; Onkelos).

According to the Midrash, land alludes to Torah 'whose ways are ways of נעם, pleasantness' [Prov. 4:3], and 'whose measure is longer than the earth' [Job 11:9].

In an alternate rendering, Radak cites a Rabbinic interpretation, writing: The passage he saw tranquility that it was good and the land that it was pleasant is a metaphor depicting how Issachar's Torah will be pleasant and fulfilling, and his toil in Torah will be his repose; therefore he bent his shoulder to bear the toil of Torah and wisdom.

Yet [lit. and] he bent his shoulder [i.e., devoted his essence] to bear.

— The burden of Torah (Rashi; Midrash; Targum Yonasan).

The translation of the conjunctive ו as yet follows the interpretation of Rashi as understood by R' Munk and other commentators: Though Issachar perceived that his territory was blessed, etc., he had little interest in material wealth. Instead, he bent his shoulder to bear the burden of Torah, and he became a servant of the Jewish people, accepting the burden of deciding the rulings of the Torah for them and answering their questions. In other words, he became their 'spiritual servant,' as it were.

B'chor Shor, Rashbam and others: When he saw that tranquility — of remaining at home and working the land instead of traveling afar and engaging in maritime trade — was good, and that the land was pleasant, and able to provide his needs without the toil of commerce, he bent his shoulder to the burden of cultivating the land [or according to Rashbam: to bear the burden of kings (i.e. paying a portion of his crops as tax)].

Similarly, according to one Sage in the Midrash, the implication is that he bent his shoulder to bear — the burden of Eretz Yisrael. That is, he set himself to the labor required by the land.

In a different sense, within the expression he bent his shoulder to bear is the implication that he humbled himself. We derive from this that every Torah scholar should have the trait of humility (R' Bachya).

49 ¹⁵ He saw tranquility that it was good,
 15 and the land that it was pleasant,
 yet he bent his shoulder to bear
 and he became an indentured laborer.

וַיִּהְיֶה לְמַסְעֶבֶר — And he became an indentured laborer.

[In the spiritual sense: as a result of Issachar's bearing the burden of Torah] he, in effect, became — to all his Israelite brothers — like an indentured worker, totally dedicated to his role of rendering decisions in matters of Torah and teaching the regulations concerning the fixing of the leap-years [סְדֵרֵי עִיבוּרִין]. This point is specifically mentioned in *I Chron.* 12:32: *The children of Issachar who knew the understanding of times, to know what Israel must do [in observing the seasons (Radak ad loc.)]; their leaders numbered two hundred — Issachar provided two hundred heads of Sanhedrin — and all their brothers followed their pronouncement [i.e. their halachic rulings were accepted as authoritative] (Rashi from Midrash).*

As mentioned in the introduction to v. 14, the tribe of Zebulun later played such a prominent role in the intellectual and religious life of the people that the Talmud [*Yoma* 26a] observes that there was hardly a decisor of halachic matters who was not from Levi or Issachar.

The sense of the idiomatic phrase לְמַסְעֶבֶר is to be interpreted as if it read עֶבֶר לְמַסְעֶבֶר, lit. laborer for tribute or tributary of labor, the sense being that the laborer in question had become obligated to perform work for the community. The term מַסְעֶבֶר has the familiar connotation of a monetary tax, but here [especially since it is qualified by עֶבֶר, laborer] it contextually refers to taxation paid by labor and physical task. According to the Rabbinic exegesis cited by Rashi, it refers to Issachar's service to the nation. Comp. *Exodus* 1:11 where מַסִּים lit. taskmasters refers to those whose job it was to afflict

them with their burdens [ibid.], and *I Kings* 5:27 where King Solomon is recorded as having raised a קָטָה [levy; tribute] where the tribute consisted of thirty thousand laborers (*R' David Feinstein*).

Thus, in the figurative sense, as interpreted by Rashi, the obligatory burden was in their round-the-clock role as halachic poskim [decisors] to their brethren.

Although Rashi agreed with Onkelos' interpretation of the beginning of this verse, he notes that Onkelos' interpretation of this part differs.

Onkelos renders, and he bowed his shoulder to bear — i.e., to bear wars and conquer regions, for the tribe of Issachar dwelled near the border; and he — i.e., the enemy conquered by Issachar — became a laboring payer of tribute.

Many commentators maintain, to the contrary, that Issachar avoided military combat. *Ibn Ezra* writes that [although we find that during the time of the early Judges Issachar produced valiant warriors whom Deborah praised in *Judges* 5:15 (*Yohel Or*)], the tribe of Issachar appreciated the tranquility of agriculture and deeply loved the land. They preferred to pay levies to the King of Israel rather than furnish soldiers [similarly *Radak* in his primary interpretation], or to pay a levy to foreign nations so they would not attack them, becoming in effect tribute-paying vassals.

Rashbam somewhat similarly interprets that Issachar paid the kings a tithe of their crops as royal tax.

16. Dan.

The Patriarch now turns to Dan since he was the oldest son of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant (*Abarbanel*).

יִי שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: יְהִי־דָן נֹתֵשׁ עָלֵינוּ מִטָּו

Dan will avenge [lit. *judge*] *his people*.

He will take vengeance for all his people from the Philistines. The prophetic allusion is to Dan's descendant, Samson [one of the Judges of Israel, who single-handedly fought the Philistines (Judges 13:24 – 16:31)] (Rashi from *Midrash*).

— This is in keeping with the interpretation that Jacob's blessings of the Tribes were allusions to prominent *descendants* of the Tribal Ancestors (*Maharzu*).

Rashi explains that the word *דָּן*, familiarly interpreted *judge*, means *avenge* in this context. It has the same meaning in *Deut. 32:36*: *כִּי יִדִּין ה' עַם*, for *HASHEM will avenge His people*.

Ramban interprets similarly, explaining that the term *דָּן* [*judge*] is used to denote the vengeance instead of the more exact term for vengeance, *נִקְמָה* [from *יקום*, *revenge*], since Samson the 'avenger' bore the title of Judge, rather than King.

The familiar term for revenge is

נִקְמָה, but that term includes even cases where the vengeance is unlawful. The term used in our verse, *דָּן*, applies only to lawful vengeance (*Be'er Yitzchak*).

Other early commentators — e.g. R' Shmuel ben Chofni, B'chor Shor, R' Meyuchas [also the *Midrash*; see next verse] — interpret *דָּן* in the literal sense of *judge* and note that this is a reference to the Judge who will descend from Dan — Samson — and will actually judge the entire nation.^[1]

בְּאֶחָד שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל — *The tribes of Israel [will be] united as one*.

The Hebrew idiomatically reads *as one of the tribes of Israel*. The translation follows Rashi's primary interpretation [as if the phrase read *שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶחָד* (*Mizrachi*)]. Alternatively, Rashi adds, one could interpret the verse to refer to the 'unique one' (*הַיָּחִיד*) from among the tribes — a reference to David, a member of Judah [the most distinguished of the tribes].^[2]

According to the latter interpreta-

1. In *Pesachim* 4a, the further intimation of the Patriarch's testament is that the Danites were a very litigious tribe — they would continually argue over money matters and go to the courts. "There was a certain man who would always say, 'Let us go to litigate.' It was inferred from this habit that he was a Danite, as the verse says *Dan will judge his people*."

2. It is the custom from Rosh Chodesh Nissan until the twelfth of that month to read, at morning services, verses from the chapter of the *Nesi'im*, tribal Princes [Numbers chapt. 7] — a selection dealing with a different *Nasi* each day.

Interestingly, the day of the week that the verses dealing with the *Nasi* of the tribe of Dan are read always coincides with the day of the week on which the next Rosh Hashanah will fall. R' Shlomo Zalman [brother of R' Chaim of Volozhin] once remarked homiletically that an allusion for this association occurs in our verse: *Dan will judge his people* — that is, on the day of the week that the portion of Dan is read, *God will judge His People*, i.e., Rosh Hashanah.

2. The Midrash observes: Had Dan not been linked with this outstanding tribe [Judah], Dan would not have produced the one judge that he did produce — Samson the son of Manoah.

Sefer Chassidim ed. Mekitzei Nirdamim, p.18, records that implicit in the Patriarch's prophetic linkage of Dan with Judah, was that Chushim, Dan's only son, would join Judah to slay Esau and thus Dan *avenge his people like the distinguished one among the tribes*.

In another Midrashic exegesis, *בְּאֶחָד* alludes to *יְחִיד* *שֶׁל עוֹלָם*, the *Unique One of the universe*, the Holy One, Blessed is He. "R' Yochanan said, Samson judged Israel like the Unique One of the tribes of Israel. Just as God needs no help in battle, Samson, too, required no assistance but slew his enemies with only the jawbone of a donkey" [Judges 15:15].

- 49 ¹⁶ **D**an will avenge his people,
 16-17 the tribes of Israel will be united as one.
¹⁷ Dan will be a serpent on the highway,

tion, the verse would mean: (Samson, the noted descendant of) *Dan will avenge his people like the 'unique one' of the tribes of Israel* (i.e., like David, of the distinguished tribe of Judah, who would slay Goliath and cut off the foreskins of a hundred Philistines [I Sam. 18:27 *Be'er Mayim Chaim*]).

Comp. Onkelos: "From the house of Dan there will be chosen and will arise a man in whose days his people shall be delivered and in whose years the tribes of Israel will have tranquility together." Targum Yonasan renders: "... All the tribes of Israel will heed him together."

Rashbam denies vigorously that in the literal sense of the passage the Patriarch would have focused his blessing on Samson — an individual who fell to the Philistines, was blinded by them, and died ignominiously together with them. Rather, he maintains that the prophetic reference is to the *tribe of Dan* who in the days of both Moses [see Num. 2:31; 10:25] and later Joshua [see Josh. 6:9] formed the rear-guard of the camps warding off the enemy and avenging attacks made on the stragglers.

Ibn Ezra maintains that the implication is a Patriarchal assurance that: Although Dan was the son of a maid-servant, he would have his own standard like the tribes of Israel who descended from the other wives, and moreover would be a ruler [during Samson's judgeship] over others. [*Radak* comments similarly.]

17. יהי דן נחש עלי דרך. — *Dan will be a serpent on the highway.*

Following *Rashi* and *Ramban*, the words apply to Samson whose single-handed tactics in battle against the Philistines corresponded closely to Jacob's description. *Ramban* suggests that he is compared to a serpent because he did not wage

open war against his enemies as did the other judges and kings, but instead went out alone to strike against them, like the serpent that leaves his lair to attack travelers on the road and then recoils into its hiding place, or like the small species of serpent that is entirely imperceptible to travelers. Similarly, using guerilla tactics, Samson struck alone without an army, and then retired into hiding.

According to *Rashbam*, as noted, the reference is to the *tribe of Dan*. [His was the northernmost tribe; the first one whom marauding invaders from the north would encounter.] The blessing was that Dan be like a serpent on the way and kill the heathens.

R' Hirsch observes that it does not say דן נחש, *Dan is a serpent*, as it says Issachar is a strong-boned donkey, or Naftali is a hind. Rather, the characteristic with which Jacob blessed Dan is not an essential part of him. Rather it is a distasteful, un-Jewish characteristic that he will adapt of necessity and discard as soon as he can. Dan will not have the strength of Judah. Not having the force with which to repel enemies, Dan will resort to cunning, doing with clever tactics what he cannot do with brute force; like a treacherous snake biting a steed's hoof so that its rider will topple backward. But Jacob did not say דן נחש, *Dan 'is' a serpent* — rather ... יהי דן, *Dan will be cunning* when forced to defend the nation, but when the danger is over, he will revert to Israel-like honesty and wholesome conduct.

ויחי מט"ח שפיפן עלי-ארח הנשף עקבי-סוס ויפל רכבו אחר: לישועתה קייתי

Primarily it is related to נשף, as in *Isaiah* 40:24 where it means *hiss; blow*. He comments further in 3:15 that, 'when a serpent comes to bite it blows with a kind of hissing sound.'

According to *Ramban*, the term refers to a snake that bites [נשף] at the heel. It derives from שפה but its second root-letter is doubled in this form. [*Radak* in *Shorashim* interprets similarly.] *Ramban* goes on to cite *Yerushalmi Terumos* 8:3 that *sh'fifon* is a small specie of serpent that seems as thin as a hair, almost imperceptible to unsuspecting travelers.

[R' Eisenstadt in his comm. to *Ramban* suggests that this serpent's thinness is alluded to by the very diminutive ון suffix of his name. Comp. such words as אישון.]

That bites a horse's heels. — הנשף עקבי-סוס

— Such being the manner of the serpent. The Torah thus continues the analogy comparing Samson with the serpent that bites the horse's heel (*Rashi*) ...

[*Rashi* makes this comment to emphasize that the subject of this phrase is the figurative serpent and not Dan himself.]

Continuing *Onkelos*: "... He will weaken the horses and chariots and throw their riders backward." *Targum Yonasan* paraphrases: "... that bites the horse on his heel, and the terrified horse throws his rider. In this way will Samson, son of Manoach, slay all the Philistine heroes, the horsemen and infantry; he will hamstring their horses and hurl their riders backwards."

So its rider falls backward. — ויפל רכבו אחר

— The rider falls although the serpent had not even touched him

directly. Similarly, Samson caused the death of many Philistines without touching them by breaking the two middle pillars of their temple, causing the roof to collapse upon them [*Judges* 16:29] (*Rashi*).

Ramban agrees, explaining that biting the horse's heel alludes to how Samson pushed down the twin pillars upon which the temple of the idol Dagan rested, and the three thousand people on the roof — figuratively, the rider falling backward — were killed. The simile depicts how a horse, when bitten, raises its head and forefeet, causing the rider to fall backward.

Onkelos translates נשף [serpent] by כחיור חורקן, like the serpent called *churman*, a species whose bite is incurable; it is [also called in Hebrew] צעפוני, *tzifoni*. It is called a *churman* because it renders everything devastated [*cherem*]. (*Rashi*).

Comp. *Targum Yonasan* to *Isaiah* 11:8 who renders צעפוני חורי חורקן. Cf. also *Jeremiah* 8:17: Behold I will send against you 'tzifoni,' serpents which cannot be charmed, i.e. they are not responsive even to a charmer and cannot be warded off.

A viper by the path. — שפיפן עלי-ארח

This parallels the description of the deadly serpent in the previous stich: "... Moreover when the circumstances warrant it, he will be like a viper who lurks by the path and venomously attacks the unsuspecting passersby" (*Ibn Caspi*).

Cf. *Onkelos*: "A unique man will

1. In the Talmud [*Sanhedrin* 105a and *Sotah* 10a] *shfifon* is related to שפי, haltingly [i.e., as if lame on one foot; cf. comm. to *Numb.* 23:3]. The double consonant is homiletically rendered as denoting double lameness and depicting a slithering movement, as if the word were an adjective, the phrase meaning: slithering along the path.

Since this blessing is Talmudically interpreted as referring to Samson, the view is recorded that Samson — here compared with a slithering serpent — was lame in both feet, and had to 'slither' along. [See *Maharsha* there.]

49 a viper by the path
18 that bites a horse's heels
 so its rider falls backward.
16 For your salvation do I long, HASHEM!

arise from the house of Dan, whose terror will fall upon the peoples; one who will smite the Philistines with strength as does the serpent *churman* [=devoted to destruction (see *Rashi* above)]. Lurking by the way he will slay the mighty of the Philistine host ..."

The translation of *shfifon* as *viper* is conjectural.

Rashi explains the term as meaning נחש [serpent]. 'I am of the opinion,' writes *Rashi*, 'that it is so called because it hisses [*noshef*] [when biting].' Cf. 3:15 נחש חשקו עקב *Rashi*, in his comm. to that verse, explains that the term חשקו [which in the context of that verse means: bite] has several meanings.

18. לישועתך קיימי ה' — For Your salvation do I long, HASHEM!

[According to *Rashi* these words were not Jacob's prayer for himself. Rather with these words he was intimating that *Samson* would one day utter a heartfelt plea to God for salvation:]

Jacob prophesied that *Samson*, blinded by the Philistines, would finally pray to God, 'Remember me, please, and strengthen me, please, only this once ...' (*Rashi*).^[1]

[Thus, according to *Rashi* the first-person in this verse is a prophetic quote of *Samson*'s prayer. *R' Saadia Gaon* and *R' Bachya* interpret similarly.]

R' Bachya explains that even though *Samson* himself died together with the Philistines, his prayer was answered by God. He prayed that he be granted the strength to demolish the Temple and cause its collapse upon himself as well; he said תמות נקשי עם פלשתים, may I die together with the Philistines.^[2]

According to *Ramban*, however, this is *Jacob*'s own outburst of prayer to God:

When *Jacob* foresaw that the salvation brought about by *Samson* would cease with the judge's capture and death, *Jacob* exclaimed, "For Your salvation do I hope, HASHEM — I do not rely on temporary salvation through a 'serpent' or a judge, but I await Your salvation — which will be for all eternity!"

Comp. the *Midrash*: *Jacob* prophetically saw *Samson* and thought that the Redemption would come in his days. But when he saw him dead he exclaimed 'He, too, is dead! Then I wait for Your salvation, HASHEM!' — It is not he who will herald the Redemption, but one who will descend from Gad — *Elijah*. [See footnote end of next verse.] *Targum Yonasan* interprets similarly.

Da'as Zekeinim explains that when *Jacob* foresaw *Samson*'s phenomenal power he said, 'Even though he is victoriously powerful it is wrong to revel in his strength' ... *Jacob* therefore emphasized that the real Source of strength is only the Almighty. The flow of the blessing, then, is: *Dan will be a*

2. *R' Bachya* writes that the Kabbalists find in this three-word prayer mystical combinations of letters that spell the Divine Name that provides salvation against enemies. This fact is alluded to in the story of *Samson*, for Scripture says of him, ויש בן, he turned with strength [Judges 16:30]; the verse does not say *Samson* used כוח, his own strength, for the strength making his feat possible was granted him by God, in response to this invocation of the Name that provides help against enemies.

In order to arrive at the combination of letters that yields this Name, the three words of this prayer must be recited in different orders. The common custom is to recite it in the *Krias Shema* before going to sleep as follows: קיימי ה' לישועתך, קיימי ה' לישועתך קיימי ה'. However, some infer that *R' Bachya* prefers a different order (see *Chavel* ed.), and *Sh'lah* requires six variations of the verse.

serpent, etc., but nevertheless, the real Victor is the Holy One, Blessed is He, as I acknowledge by stating, *For Your salvation do I hope, HASHEM*.

Rashbam interprets: I pray, Dan, that God grant you His salvation and strengthen you in the task of fighting the nations. He renders, *That you be granted [Divine] salvation, [O Dan], do I pray to HASHEM*.

Ibn Ezra interprets similarly, that upon prophetically seeing his son as a serpent biting a horse's heel, he grew apprehensive that the 'serpent' would be in mortal danger that the rider would crush its head. Jacob therefore interjected, *For your Godly salvation, O Dan, do I hope*. The prayer לַיְשׁוּעָתְךָ קוּיִתִּי ה' either means: *I have hoped that HASHEM will be your salvation*, or: *that HASHEM will save you*.¹¹

Ibn Ezra goes on to cite R' Yitzchak who postulates that when Jacob envisioned his son Dan as a serpent [possibly intimating cunning wickedness] Jacob grew frightened and prayed that God save him [Jacob from evil descendants].

An interpretation has been advanced that at that moment Jacob's sickness grew sharply worse, so he prayed that God save him and grant him the strength to bless his other sons. Most commentators, however [see e.g. *HaKsav V'HaKaballah*; *Yohel Or*], dismiss this as being 'without rhyme or reason,' and as entirely conjectural and out of context with the Scriptural narrative, which does not even hint at such a possibility. Furthermore, a brief remission from sickness is not the con-

notation of the term יְשׁוּעָה, *salvation*, which has a more permanent, long lasting connotation.

19. Gad.

Jacob now blesses Gad, the eldest son of Leah's maidservant Zilpah (*Abarbanel*).

גַּד גְּדוּר יִגְדֵנוּ — *Gad will recruit a regiment* [lit. *a troop will troop from Gad*. The Hebrew verbs *g'dud y'gudenu* were chosen for this context because they are plays on the name Gad].

I.e., the tribe of Gad will recruit regiments of troops from its citizens. The reference is to the time when the Israelites crossed the Jordan to conquer *Eretz Yisrael*. Although the Gadites' territory was on the east of the Jordan, and they had no personal interest in the conquest, they nobly sent armed troops across the Jordan to assist their brothers in waging war. The Gadites valiantly fought the Canaanite nations together with the other tribes and remained until the Land was conquered (*Rashi*; *Midrash*).

The translation of גַּד יִגְדֵנוּ as יִגְדֵנוּ, literally: *shall troop forth, from him*, rather than in the reflexive: *troops shall troop against him*, follows *Rashi* who compares the verb form with יָצְאוּ in *Jeremiah* 10:20 which means *have gone forth from me* [i.e., have left me] rather than *have gone out toward me*. [Cf. *Rashi* on תִּקְלָמוּ, *Exod.* 15:9].

1. R' Munk makes the incisive observation that Jacob had need to pray for the entire tribe of Dan, for it faced physical and spiritual dangers greater than that of the other tribes. Physically, as the extreme northernmost tribe in *Eretz Yisrael* proper, Dan was more exposed to attack than any other tribe on the western side of the Jordan. Spiritually, there was even greater cause for foreboding. It seems that idolatry had a greater lure for Dan than for any other tribe: it became the haven of Michah's idol [*Judges* ch. 18], and it was the tribe that worshiped the golden calves set up by King Jeroboam in its territory [*I Kings* 12:30]. Jacob feared that the entire tribe would suffer the fate of its illustrious son, Samson, whose tragic fate was partly caused by his marriage to a Philistine woman. Knowing this prophetically, Jacob prayed for God's salvation for Dan.

49 ¹⁹ Gad will recruit a regiment
19 and it will retreat in its tracks.

Rashi explains further — citing the grammarian Menachem ben Seruk — that all of the words in this verse containing the letters גר are to be classified under the cognate noun גר. The two-letter root is גר, but as is the rule with all such roots, the second root-letter is doubled when the word occurs as a noun; hence גרור. Cf. שר/גרורים/לגור/גר; שור/גרור. In the *kal*, future tense [as in our verse], the root letter is not doubled; hence: גרור; גרור. [Thus גרור=גרור, shall troop forth, from him.] However, when the verb is reflexive or causative [which is not the case here according to *Rashi*] the second root letter is doubled: גרור; גרור; גרור; גרור.

[For differing interpretations of this phrase by *Ramban* and others, see below.]

והוא יגר עקב — And it will retreat in its tracks [lit. it shall troop, heel].

Following *Rashi*: And after the conquest, Gad's regiment will return safely to their territory on the east of the Jordan עקב, in its tracks, i.e. by the same roads and paths upon which they had initially traveled — and not one of the troops will be missing. The expression עקב [lit. heel] has the meaning of *footpaths; tracks; comp. Psalms 128:20; Song of Songs 1:8*. [Thus, the term עקב in this context idiomatically means: *shall retrace their footsteps*.]

Ramban is in apparent disagreement with *Rashi*'s grammatical analysis of the word גרור [see above] and following the interpretation in *Yerushalmi Sotah* 8:10, explains the passage as follows: גר גרור, Gad: troops shall constantly raid him, והוא יגר עקב, but he [the word והוא, lit. and he being emphatic in this syntax] shall raid at their heel. That is, since Gad had a large area east of the Jordan, his land would be surrounded by

enemies and subject to constant attack by neighboring Ammon and Moab. Jacob praised the valor and courage of Gad, stating that the Gadites would not be dismayed by these invading troops but would follow the enemy in his tracks, pursue him, and be victorious over him 'returning on the heel of those who tried to shame him.' The connotation is similar to Moses' later blessing [*Deut. 33:20*]: *Blessed be He that enlarges Gad; he dwells like a lioness*, i.e. he lurks like a lioness over the 'prey' of the foreign troops that always attempted to invade his enlarged territory. Gad would be undaunted by them, and would always be victorious.

Ramban suggests further that this passage might be a prophetic allusion to the wars of the Ammonites against Jephthah the Gileadite [see *Judges 11:33*]. Troops from Ammon would always raid Gilead, and the reference is to the occasion when Jephthah, after they refused his overtures of peace, won a smashing victory over them and their cities. *Ramban* explains that the conflict of Ammon with Gad was because the Gadites inherited all the cities of Gilead and half the cities of Ammon. [Gilead was a city of Gad. See *Joshua 13:25*.] Jacob prophetically alluded to this specific event in his testament to Gad since it was a great miracle, just as he alluded specifically to Samson's miraculous slaughter of the Philistines in his testament to Dan.

Onkelos interprets עקב as denoting *wealth; substance* [comp. *Deut. 7:5* which *Ibn Ezra* interprets as *reward*]. He renders our passage: From the house of Gad armed legions will go over the Jordan before their brothers in battle; and with much substance will they return to their land.

According to *Rashbam*, the reference is to the war of Joshua when the Gadite troops would march in the forefront [see *Josh. 6:9* and comp. there] as the Israelites went out to conquer the Land;

ויחי כ עָקֵב: מֵאֶשֶׁר שְׁמֶנָה לְחֵמוֹ וְהוּא יִתֵּן
מט/כ-כא כא מְעַדְנֵי-מֶלֶךְ: נִפְתָּלִי אֵילָה שְׁלָחָה

and on their victorious return from battle, they would bring up the rear to defend against possible attacks from the defeated enemy.

Sforno explains the implication to be: *Gad shall go forward and attack* [in contrast with *Dan* who will use guerrilla tactics] *and he will battle his enemies at the heel*, that is, his enemies will flee from his superior forces.

The Midrash interprets similarly, rendering יגדנו גדר meaning *cut; destroy; despoil: Battalions shall come to despoil Gad, but Gad will cut them down at their heel*, i.e. as they flee him. [R' Shmuel ben Chofni and Tur, similarly.]

According to *Ibn Ezra*, Jacob was prophesying that a troop will pounce upon Gad but Gad will be victorious עָקֵב, *in the end* [the *heel* being so called because it is at the extremity of the body — i.e., he will have the final victory.] *Ibn Ezra* writes [that it is unknown to us exactly which event Jacob meant since] 'we cannot know today all the tribulations that befell our ancestors.'⁽¹⁾

Another possible translation is: *Good fortune will pursue Gad, and he will have good fortune in the end*. See 30:10 (*Akeidah*).

20. Asher.

Having blessed Gad, Zilpah's older son, Jacob now continues with her younger son. *Daas Zekeinim* [cited below] advances an explanation for the continuity between Gad and Asher in this connection.

From Asher — his bread [will have] richness [lit. oil].

I.e., the food [referred to here, as is common in Scripture, as *bread*] that will come *from* [the territory of] *Asher* will be 'oily' in the sense that *Asher's* land will be so rich in olive groves that it will flow with oil like a fountain. Moses blessed *Asher* similarly [Deut. 33:24]: נִטְבֵּל: בְּשֶׁמֶן רָגְלוֹ, *he shall dip his foot in oil*. As we find related in the Talmud [*Menachos* 85b]: Once the people of *Laodicia* were in need of oil. Only at a city in *Asher* was their agent able to obtain the very large quantity they needed, after having failed at *Jerusalem* and other cities (*Rashi*).

Rashi thus interprets the prefix מֵאֶשֶׁר [lit. *from Asher*] as denoting *from the territory of Asher*. *Ibn Ezra* interprets similarly, contrary to the view of R' Avraham ben HaRambam who suggests that the מֵ is poetically superfluous, much like the last י in הַיּוֹשֵׁב, a word which is synonymous with הַיּוֹשֵׁב. The sense according to the latter view is that our passage is constructed like v. 19, the syntactical sense being: [As for *Asher*: *his food shall be rich*].

Rashbam explains that the Israelites used to dip their food in oil supplied from *Asher* [thus: *from Asher: the oil for its* (i.e. the Israelite nation's) *food*].

Rashi's interpretation of *bread* as a general

1. The Sages in the Midrash perceive a Messianic allusion in this verse. As noted in the comm. to v. 18: Jacob originally thought that Samson, a descendant of *Dan*, would herald the redemption of Israel. But when he prophetically saw him dead, he foresaw that the Redemption would be heralded by a descendant of *Gad* — *Elijah*.

Accordingly, the passage, but *Gad ... will troop at the End* [עָקֵב, *heel*, referring to the *End*; see *Ibn Ezra* above], Midrashically refers to *Elijah*, a descendant of *Gad*, who in the *End* of Days will be the precursor of the Messiah, as it says [*Malachi* 3:23]: *Behold I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of HASHEM*.

[Cf. also *Bereishis Rabbah* 71:9. *Elijah* hailed from *Gilead* (see *I Kings* 17:1), and as *Ramban* notes above, s.v. וְהוּא יִגֵּד, *Gilead* is associated with *Gad*. There are differing Midrashic opinions on this matter, however. Some say *Elijah* was a *Kohen* and others say he was a *Benjaminite*.]

49 ²⁰ From Asher — his bread will have richness,
20 and he will provide kingly delicacies.

term for food is consistent with his interpretation of the word in 31:54.

Radak suggests that the prefix מ, of Asher, might indicate that only a portion of Asher's territory would be rich. He further interprets that bread is a metaphor for soil, since it is the soil that yields bread. In general, however, the term embraces all food.

According to Midrash Tanchuma, bread is a metaphor for women, the sense being that the women of Asher were beautiful.

Daas Zekeinim followed by Tur interprets this verse as reverting to Gad: If Gad will be so involved in military pursuits, when will he have the time to cultivate his own Land? The answer given is: From Asher shall his [Gad's] food be rich, and he [i.e. Asher] will provide him [i.e. Gad] with royal dainties. Included in this verse, then, is Asher's blessing as well, since by implication he learns that his territory will be fertile and abundant.

After saying that Dan and Gad will defend Israel against external foes, Jacob turned to two tribes, Asher and Naftali, who would advance the nation's internal prosperity. Asher would provide choice food; apparently his soil was better suited to growing luxuries than ordinary necessities (Daas Zekeinim).

According to Chizkuni, since Jacob did not really bless Gad, he now blessed his territory by implication: More than [this being the meaning of the prefix מ] Asher's shall his, that is, Gad's, bread be rich, for his territory shall be fertile. This does not imply, however, that Asher's own territory would be in any way deficient, since he — Asher — too, shall provide royal dainties, but nevertheless, Gad's territory shall be superior.

Ibn Ezra observes that our verse uses לָחֵם as a feminine noun as it is modified by a feminine adjective, שְׁמֵנָה. In other places, however, the word occurs as a masculine noun. He concludes therefore, that לָחֵם is among those words, such as אִשׁ and רוּחַ, which can occur either in the masculine or feminine forms.

וְהוּא יִתֵּן מִצְרֵי מֶלֶךְ — And he will provide [lit. give] kingly delicacies.

His rich produce will be worthy of royal tables and will be sought by kings (Radak; R' Meyuchas).

The term מִצְרֵי is thus derived from עֵרֶן, pleasure; when applied to food it means delicacy.

Rashbam interprets מִצְרֵי from עֵרֶן as emollient; ointment. Comp. עֵרְנָה, delicate skin, in 18:12. The meaning here is: And he will provide royal emollients. That is, kings will use his oil to make softening ointments for their skin. The Talmud [Menachos 86a] speaks of anafakinon, which is the oil of not-yet-ripe olives. It was used for smearing as it removes hair and softens the skin.

Following Tanchuma that 'bread' is a metaphor for women [see comm. to 39:6, 'Except for the bread'], the intimation here is that the kings of Israel would take their queens from the tribe of Asher. Furthermore, the Midrash notes, whenever the kings were angry at the Asherites, they forgave them for the sake of these queens.

Midrash Rabbah, homiletically reading the unvowelized word שְׁמֵנָה [rich; oily] as if it were also vowelized שְׁמֵנָה, eight, interprets: His land shall be rich, his bread shall be rich, and he shall be the ancestor of those who wear eight garments [for his tribe will provide wives for High Priests, who, in the course of their service, wore eight vestments].

There is a further view in the Midrash that the blessing alludes to the capacity of Asher's soil to yield fine oil and that his tribe would furnish the sacred olive oil for the Temple.

21. Naftali.

Having blessed Zilpah's son, Jacob now reverts to bless Bilhah's younger son, and thus conclude the sons of the maidservants.

נפתלי אֵלֶּה שְׁלֹחַ — *Naftali is a hind let loose.*

Rashi offers three interpretations based on different Midrashim:

□ 1. This is a figurative reference to Naftali's territory, specifically to the Plain of Gennesar [a district near the Sea of Kinnereth, which, as noted in *Joshua* 19:25, was located in Naftali's district; see *Onkelos* to *Deut.* 3:17 who renders Kinnereth as *Gennesar*] where the crops ripen swiftly, like a running hind. The expression *hind let loose* means let loose to run free.

The metaphor of hind שְׁלֹחַ, *sent forth*, refers to a hind that had been captured and was then released, so that it runs all the faster to escape (*Daas Zekeinim*).

□ 2. This alludes to the war against Sisera [during the time of Deborah the prophetess, a descendant of Naftali, when Barak from Kadesh-Naftali led Israelite forces in a war against the Canaanite forces led by their general, Sisera (*Judges* 4ff)]. The valiant and swift warriors of Naftali played a leading role in this battle. Scripture *ibid.* relates that Deborah told Barak, *Take with you ten thousand men of the tribe of Naftali*, and they deployed there most swiftly. The term שְׁלֹחַ, in the sense of *run quickly* is used there describing the

incident [*ibid.* 5:15]. [*Rashbam* renders somewhat similarly that the reference is to the warriors of Naftali who were nimble as hinds.]

The Midrash records that while other tribes were compared to animals [see *Sotah* 11b], only Naftali is compared to a female animal, an אֵלֶּה, *hind*. This was to allude to his female descendant, the prophetess Deborah.

□ 3. It is a reference to the Talmudic tradition that on the day Jacob was buried, Naftali's swiftness afoot was instrumental in establishing the Patriarch's right to burial in the family sepulchre (see below).

As related in the Talmud [*Sotah* 13a], when Jacob's sons desired to bury him in the Cave of Machpelah, Esau [according to the *Midrash* 98:17 and *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 9, the Hittites] tried to stop them claiming that he, as firstborn had the right to burial in the cave. Esau challenged, 'Produce your deed of title to this cave.'

'It is in Egypt,' they replied.

'Who shall go for it?' they pondered. — 'Naftali, who is swift as a hind.' And they dispatched Naftali who brought it back swiftly like a hind let loose.

R' Hirsch observes that if hind could be used as messengers, one could be sure that they would carry out their missions swiftly. Accordingly, Jacob's implication was that Naftali, although he does not do things on his own initiative, can be trusted to execute swiftly whatever has been entrusted to him by those responsible for the benefit of the community.^[1]

1. Ancient rulers used to send hinds as message-bearers [much in the manner that homing pigeons were used for this task]. Hinds born in one country would be brought to another. When the king of the latter country wished to dispatch a message to the king of the former country, he would select a hind from there, attach a message to its horns, and release it to run quickly to its original habitat where the king would receive the message. The phrase *who delivers beautiful sayings* [v. 21] alludes to this mission of the swift hind.

This practice is mentioned in *Yerushalmi Shevi'is* 9:2, where an incident is recorded that a

49 ²¹ **Naftali is a hind let loose**
21 **who delivers beautiful sayings.**

Abarbanel — consistent with his interpretation that in his blessings to each of the tribes Jacob was insinuating why none of the tribes were suitable for royalty except Judah — explains that Jacob was implying that Naftali possessed qualities fit for royal *servitors*, but not for kings themselves.

הַנָּתַל אֲמָרֵי שֶׁפֶר — *Who delivers* [lit. *gives*] *beautiful sayings*.

Generally, this refers to the tribe's reputation for eloquence (*Abarbanel*). According to the *Targumim*, the name Naftali is a composite of נֹתַן לוֹ, *the honey which flows from him*, as in *Proverbs* 24:13.

Following *Rashi's* three interpretations cited above:

□ 1. [That the first half of the verse figuratively refers to the swiftness of the ripening of the fruit, and its excellence] ... *Who delivers beautiful sayings*: They [i.e. the people of Naftali] will, with beautiful words, give thanks and praise God for them [i.e., for the fruits] (*Onkelos* renders similarly).

□ 2. [That the blessing is a prophetic allusion to Deborah and the swift prowess of Barak and the valiant ten thousand men of the tribe of Naftali in the war against Sisera:] A reference to the beautiful song Deborah and Barak would

sing in honor of their valiant struggle [*Judges*, chapt. 5].

□ 3. [That the blessing is an allusion to what occurred on the day of Jacob's burial when Naftali fetched the title deed to the Cave of Machpelah]: The Talmud [*Sotah* 13a], to which *Rashi* refers, continues: "... Instead of 'who delivers *imrei shefer*' [beautiful sayings], interpretively reads the phrase 'who delivers *imrei sefer*' [words of the document; i.e. the ownership deed]."

Moreover, according to some Midrashic sources Naftali was the one who first announced to Jacob that Joseph was still alive. [See on 45:26.]

B'chor Shor perceives the allusion to be that whenever the Israelites were victorious in a battle, it was the fleet-footed tribe of Naftali that always brought the good tidings.

R' Hirsch observes that the subject of the masculine form הַנָּתַל, *who gives*, cannot be the feminine, אֵילָה, *hind*, but must be *Naftali*. [Hence we translated 'who gives' rather than 'which gives'.] שֶׁפֶר — unlike יָפֶה which designates radiant, external beauty as perceived by the beholder — designates a graceful conformation of the separate parts of an object. Referring to speech, the word denotes elegant articulation. Thus, Naftali is not original in deed or thought but he is skillful at taking the thoughts of

hind born in *Eretz Yisrael* was brought to Africa and kept in captivity there for thirteen years. Then its horns were covered with silver [to provide a means of identifying the animal] and it was released from captivity. It returned shortly to its original habitat in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The figurative allusion here is that Naftali, *satisfied with favor and full* [as Moses was later to bless him in *Deut.* 33:23], would go forth to all of Israel with tidings that his land had produced abundant fruit as our Rabbis have mentioned concerning the fruit of Gennesar (*Ramban*).

[*Ramban* is referring to *Berachos* 44a where it is recorded that the unusual fruit of Gennesar in Naftali's territory was considered more nourishing than bread. This had halachic ramifications as well, for the Sages ruled that if one ate these particular fruits together with bread, one recited the Blessing over the fruit since they were the primary food (see *Rashi ad loc.*)]

others and articulating and executing them beautifully and speedily.

According to *Ibn Ezra*, שלוחה means sent as a gift [comp. Micah 1:14], the sense being that [the produce of] Naftali is like a hind sent as a gift, [the recipients of] which will give [i.e., express their gratitude with] eloquent words.

Chizkuni takes אֵילָה to be related to אֵילָן, terebinth tree; שלוחה to mean planted – as in Isaiah 16:8, שלוחתיה, her offshoots; and אֶמֶר to mean bough – as in Isaiah 17:6, אֶמֶר – the fine uppermost bough. Accordingly, he suggests the following possible interpretation: Naftali's plains will be densely planted with trees, yielding boughs of beautiful produce.

Malbim similarly interprets: Naftali's territory which extended so far that it touched the territory of several other tribes is like a tree whose fine foliage extends in all directions, and yields fine boughs.

[See Ramban's interpretation of this stich in the footnote on previous page.]

22. Joseph.

A charming son is Joseph. בן פרת יוסף

The translation of פרת [poras] as charming, graceful, charismatic follows Rashi according to whom the word is related to the Aramaic אַפְרִיין of similar meaning. Comp. the Talmudic expression *apirion namtaye* – let us be charming to ... [see Bava Metzia 119a].

Onkelos relates פרת פרי, fruit, fruitfulness [לשון פריה ורביה] and renders: Joseph is a thriving son.

Rashbam similarly renders: a prolific son is Joseph.

In a grammatical note, Rashi writes that the n of פרת [is not indicative of the feminine form, but] is for stylistic purposes, similar to the n in Eccles. 3:18 which is synonymous with רבך.

Ramban disagrees with: a) Rashi's

basing Scriptural interpretation upon the use of a foreign word like the Aramaic expression *apirion*; b) Rashi's connection of *poras* with *apirion*, since the n of *apirion* is part of the root [whereas *poras* has no n]; c) Rashi's definition of *apirion* as charming; which Ramban suggests it does not mean. [Mizrachi defends Rashi against each of these objections.]

Ramban, therefore, suggests that the phrase could be translated a fruitful son, like Onkelos who interprets *poras* as related to פרי, fruit; or, as the grammarians [see Radak, Shorashim s.v. בנה] interpret it, *poras* could mean branch (cf. the word פֶּאֶרֶח, branch, in Ezekiel 31:5) and בן [usually translated son] could be branch or bough, a meaning the word has in Psalms 80:16 [since a bough is a 'son' i.e., offshoot, of the tree (Radak)]. According to the latter view, our verse means: Joseph is a בן פרת, multi-twigged bough.

Ramban concurs that *poras* means multi-branched but maintains that בן, vowelized as it is with a *tzeirei* rather than a *segol*, is not in the construct mode with the word פרת, in which case בן would refer to the 'son' or twig of פרת, a larger branch]. Rather, בן is an independent word retaining its usual primary meaning of son. Consequently, Ramban renders: Joseph is a son like a multi-branched sapling, or more literally, 'son, a multi-branched sapling is Joseph.' Jacob used the term son parenthetically to display affection, as he did in the case of Judah [above v. 9]: From the prey, my son, you have elevated yourself.

Abarbanel renders: A son of [המפוארת], the most beautiful of women [Rachel], is Joseph.

Targum Yonasan interpretively paraphrases: Joseph, my son, you have become great; Joseph my son, you have

49 ²² **A** charming son is Joseph
 22 a charming son to the eye;
 each of the girls climbed heights to gaze.

become great and mighty; your destiny was to become mighty because you subdued your Inclination in the matter of your matron [i.e. Potiphar's wife].

The Midrash homiletically relates *poras* to פָּרוֹת, cows, and renders: A son [made great] through cows is Joseph [alluding to Joseph's rise to prominence as a result of the cows of Pharaoh's dream].

In the case of the other sons Jacob mentioned their names before their blessing [e.g. Reuben — you are my first-born; Simeon and Levi are comrades; Judah — you your brothers shall acknowledge; Issachar is a strong-boned donkey] while in the case of Joseph he did not begin with his name. Jacob acted this way in order to confer honor to him by treating him like a monarch whom one does not address by name (*Hadar Zekeinim*).

בן פֶּתַח עֵינַי — A charming son to the eye.

The phrase allows for various interpretations:

□ His charm attracts the eye of the beholder. The Sages [*Berachos* 20a] perceive a further implication: He is *עַלְיָן*, raised above the eye, in the sense that the Evil Eye will be ineffective against his children. So, too, when Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh [above 48:16] he blessed them that they be like fish which the Evil Eye cannot affect (*Rashi*).¹¹

□ The word *עַיִן* [eye] in this context means spring; fountain [as in 24:42]. The implication is: He is like a many-branched sapling planted by a fountain whose waters never dry up (*Ramban*).

Comp. Onkelos: Joseph is my son who shall thrive, my son who shall be

blessed, like a vine planted by a fountain of waters.— Such plants planted by fountains of water will thrive and their leaves will not wither. Comp. *Psalms* 1:3: He shall be like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaf never withers and everything he does will succeed. Similarly, Joseph's progeny through his sons Ephraim and Menasseh will flourish and be numerous (*Radak*).

□ The stich is poetically repeated as is usual in Scripture. In such cases the second stich complements and amplifies the first. Compare, for example, *Psalms* 93:3: like rivers they raised, O HASHEM, like rivers they raised their voice [the second stich explains what they raised]; *ibid.* 92:10; *ibid.* 94:3; *Eccles.* 1:1: 'Futility of futilities' said Koheles, 'futility of futilities, all is futile!' In this case, too, our stich amplifies Joseph's fruitfulness: He is a prolific son over the eye, i.e., so tall in stature that all must look up to regard him (*Rashbam*; *Bchor Shor*).

Radak maintains, however, that there is a definite reason why the phrase is doubled in this blessing: It is an allusion to the two tribes that will branch out from Joseph — Ephraim and Menasseh. [See *Ramban* in footnote and *Onkelos* further.]

□ *Abarbanel*: The son of a woman beautiful in the eyes of all who saw her.

בָּנוֹת עָצְרוּ עַלֵי שׁוֹר. Each of the girls climbed heights [lit. daughters — she stepped] to gaze.

□ A reference to how the Egyptian

1. *Rashi* cites a Midrashic interpretation of this passage which, according to him, 'fits in with the text.' [He alluded to it in his commentary to 33:7 s.v. אֲזַכְּרֶנּוּ, in slightly different form.]

When Esau came to meet Jacob [and each of Jacob's wives with their children came forward

girls used to climb [atop the wall^[1]] to catch a glimpse of his beauty when he passed by [see footnote on p. 1801]. The term *עלי שור* is to be interpreted [in order] to gaze [see below]. 'There are many Midrashic expositions, but this inclines nearest to the literal sense of the verse' (Rashi).

Rashi notes further that the word *בנות*, girls, is in plural while the verb *עצרה* is in singular. He offers that the verb is to be perceived as emphasizing that every single one of the young woman tried to find herself the best vantage point from which to catch a

glimpse of him. [בן Ezra and others cite many examples of how Scripture poetically changes forms from singular to plural in mid-verse.]

Furthermore, Rashi explains that the verb *שור*, gaze, is similar to *אשרנו*, I behold him, in Num. 24:17; the form *שור* is in the infinitive, synonymous with *לשור*, to see. *עלי* is the poetical form of *על*, which in our context means for the purpose of. Consequently, the phrase *עלי שור* means in order to gaze.

Rashbam similarly interprets this stich as referring to how the Egyptian women used to gaze upon him, as did Potiphar's wife and her companions. He offers that the stich *עלי שור* poetically

to present themselves to Esau), Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah preceded their children [see 3:6 and 7]. However, in the case of Rachel it was the reverse. There, as the verse states [ibid. v. 7]: Afterwards, [first] Joseph [and then] Rachel came forward. Joseph reasoned, 'This wicked man [Esau] is haughty. He may fix his gaze upon my mother [and desire her].' He stepped in front of her and drew himself up to his full height in order to shield her [from Esau's gaze].

Alluding to this incident, his father called him *בן פרת*, a son who grew in stature (by protecting his mother) *עלי עין*, against the 'eye' [i.e., gaze] of Esau.

In reward for Joseph was blessed with 'greatness' [i.e., a distinguished position in Egypt], inasmuch as the Egyptian women climbed up to look at him (see next stich) when he went forth [as Viceroy] over Egypt (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 12).

Another exegesis — with halachic ramifications — is elicited from our verse. During most of the time until the Temple was erected in Jerusalem, offerings were brought in *שילה*, the Tabernacle of Shiloh, a city in the territory of Joseph's son Ephraim. The Mishnah [Zevachim 112b] records several laws that applied only to Shiloh. One of them was that *קרבנים קלים*, offerings of a lesser degree of holiness, such as peace offerings, may be eaten throughout the vicinity of Shiloh, as far as the Tabernacle can be seen. [In contrast, when the Temple stood, such offerings could be eaten only within the walls of Jerusalem.]

The Gemara [ibid. 119b] derives this exegetically from our verse: Joseph is a fruitful son [i.e., his territory, as regards eating certain sacrifices, will be abundant (see Rashi there)] — *על עין* through the eye. That is, let him, whose eye would not enjoy what did not belong to it [an allusion to Joseph who avoided the advances of Potiphar's wife], be privileged [in his territory] to consume sacrifices as far as the eye can see.

1. [The words *על החוקה*, atop the wall, do not occur in every edition of Rashi, and where they do occur they are usually enclosed within parentheses. As is evident from Mizrahi, Rashi does not subscribe to the view of many other commentators (see below) that *עלי שור* means upon the wall. Accordingly Rashi's citation here of the Midrash cited in the footnote on p. 1801 that the Egyptian girls would climb atop walls to catch a glimpse of Joseph's beauty, is not taken as a translation of the Scriptural phrase *עלי שור*.]

Rather Rashi interprets the phrase to mean: [daughters climbed] to gaze. In order to explain where they climbed, Rashi adds that they climbed walls to get a better look at him. Sefer HaZikaron and Be'er Yitzchak therefore do not include the words *atop the wall* in their text of Rashi.

Maskil l'David, however, suggests that Rashi is offering two interpretations of *עלי שור*: a) it means wall and the verse tells us that the Egyptian girls would climb atop walls to gaze upon him; and alternatively b) *עלי שור* means gaze and tells us that they longed to gaze upon him. Following this view of Maskil l'David, several printed editions of Rashi contain a parenthetical printer's notation that the abbreviation *על עין* (אחר), another interpretation should precede Rashi's statement that *עלי שור* means gaze.]

parallels צֶלֶי עֵין, *for the eye*, in the previous stich.

□ *Ramban* interprets בְּנוֹת as *boughs* — i.e. offshoots, of the branches פֶּאֶרֶת=פֶּאֶרֶת, earlier in the verse — and חוֹקֶה as שֹׁרֶה, *wall*. Thus, having compared Joseph to a multi-branched tree that is planted beside a live fountain, Jacob mentions that the *boughs*, i.e., his offspring, will climb over the sky-high walls. [That is, his progeny will be so abundant that they will figuratively 'run over the wall' (*Ibn Ezra* interprets similarly).] Furthermore, the metaphor is one of great fertility: his branches [i.e., offspring] will be so long and so heavily laden with fruit that they will have to rest upon a wall.¹²¹

□ *Onkelos* interpretively paraphrases: Two tribes [בְּנוֹת in the sense of *descendants*] will descend from his sons. They will receive a portion and inheritance.

Thus, *Onkelos'* figurative interpretation is similar to *Ramban's* that Joseph's 'branches' will 'run over the wall'. They will be prolific, and receive much territory.

According to *Onkelos'* rendition, one would expect the masculine בָּנִים, *sons*, instead of the feminine בְּנוֹת, *daughters*. The allusion, however, is specifically to the *daughters* of Zelafchad — of the tribe of Manasseh — who inherited territory on both sides of the Jordan (*Rashi* from *Tanchuma*, *Pinchas*). [See *Numbers* 27:1; *Joshua* 17:6.]

2. Jacob's blessing of Joseph clearly alludes to the two tribes that descended from him — Ephraim and Manasseh. This is based upon the connotation of the term *poras* [branches] as well as *banos* [boughs]. Jacob spoke of them as offspring of a single tree rather than as completely separate tribes. Knowing that the destined number of tribes was twelve, Jacob did not wish to designate them explicitly as two separate tribes because he wished not to exceed the number twelve.

[As a general rule in the Torah, the number of tribes is twelve: when Manasseh and Ephraim are counted separately in place of Joseph, as they are regarding the inheritance of territory in *Eretz Yisrael*, Levi is also omitted because Levi did not receive a tribal portion, only far-flung cities of residence. Where Levi is counted, Ephraim and Manasseh are considered to be branches of the tribe of Joseph, as in Jacob's blessings. See *Sforno* v. 28.]

Moses also alluded to the dual 'horns' that would branch forth from Joseph [33:17], but he made a specific reference to Ephraim and Manasseh since he omitted the name of Simeon as the commentators note there (*Ramban*).

That is, they 'straddled the wall' — alluding to the Jordan that was as formidable a barrier to Moses as a 'wall', preventing his entry into the Land — and they overran this wall and inherited territory on both sides of it (*Bertinoro*).

Or following the latter, the verse could be rendered: *Daughters will walk the boundaries* [of their lands; women will be among the foremost of Joseph's descendants who will inherit the land].

Ramban in 48:6 maintains, however, that the reference is to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. He explains that the connotation is that each of them will inherit a share of the land equal to that of Jacob's sons. 'Portion' refers to the extra share of the firstborn, and 'inheritance' refers to the ordinary inheritance; Joseph was treated as the firstborn in the sense that two portions of the land went to his progeny.

□ *Sforno* perceives a different connotation. He interprets that the verse compares Joseph to a flourishing vine. He notes that a vine is not noticed beyond its immediate vicinity until its branches grow over the vineyard wall that encloses it. Only then is it revealed unexpectedly on the other side to people who did not even know of its existence. So did Joseph suddenly make himself known to his family when they thought he no longer existed.

□ *Abarbanel*: The praises of his mother's [i.e., Rachel's] beauty surpassed that of all other women; [עַל כָּל הַבָּנוֹת צֶעֱרָה בְּיָפֶיהָ ע"ד רֵאיוֹן] [בְּנוֹת וְיִאֲשֵׁרֶיהָ].

ויחי כג וַיִּמְרְרוּהוּ וְרָבוּ וַיִּשְׁטְמֵהוּ בְּעַלֵּי חָצִים:
מט/כג-כד כד וַתֵּשֶׁב בְּאֵיתָן קִשְׁתּוֹ וַיִּפְּזוּ זְרָעֵי יִרְיֹו

23. וַיִּמְרְרוּהוּ וְרָבוּ — *They embittered him and [they] became antagonists.*

The reference is to Joseph's brothers, as well as Potiphar and his wife, all of whom dealt bitterly with him. In *Exodus 1:14*, too, וַיִּמְרְרוּהוּ has the meaning of *dealing bitterly*. The subject of וְרָבוּ, *they became antagonists*, is Joseph's brothers, whose relationship with him deteriorated to a point where [37:4] *they hated him; and they could not speak to him personally (Rashi).*

[According to Rashi (as understood by the commentators) this verse begins a new thought to be linked with the next verse, tracing Joseph's rise to prominence notwithstanding the hatred and slander to which he had been exposed.]

Rashbam, however, links our verse with the previous one: Because Joseph was so handsome that girls jumped on walls to gaze upon him, Potiphar's wife desired him; but because he spurned her she viciously slandered him and made life bitter for him, but finally he rose to prominence despite her.

In a long grammatical dissertation, Rashi justifies his translations of רָבוּ in the passive sense meaning that they 'became' antagonists. He explains that the word cannot be interpreted in the *kal* form as meaning *they antagonized or aggrrieved*, for if so the word would be נִרְבּוּ [from the root רָבָה] as it is in *Numbers 20:13* where it has that meaning. Nor could it mean [as some commentators interpret] *and they shot arrows* [from the root רָבָה] for in that case, too, it would be vowelized רָבוּ. Vowelized as it is, רָבוּ is to be interpreted in the passive [*pu'al*] form like the word שָׁמוּ in *Jeremiah 2:12* meaning *become astonished* — lit. *astonish yourselves*; רָמוּ in *Job 24:24* meaning *become exalted* — lit. *exalt yourselves*; רָמוּ in *Isaiah 23:2* mean-

ing *be silent* — lit. *silence yourselves*. In all these cases these words have essentially the same meaning as in their *hoph'al* counterpart forms except that the connotation of *hoph'al* is that the action is caused or forced by others, while in the *pu'al* form of our verse the connotation is that the action arose out of the people themselves; hence וְרָבוּ denotes how they became men of contention in regard to Joseph. *Onkelos* similarly renders the sense: וְנִקְמְדוּהוּ, *and they avenged themselves against him*.

Rashbam differs and maintains that vowelized as it is, רָבוּ is derived from the root רָבַח, *to shoot*, just as the root טָבַח is conjugated טָבוּ, and רָנַן is conjugated רָנִי. He explains that the allusion is to the 'archers' mentioned further in the verse. Joseph's enemies hurled accusations at him like *archers shooting arrows*, the expression alluding to Potiphar's wife who slandered him. *Ibn Ezra* interprets similarly, but suggests that וַיִּמְרְרוּהוּ is from the word מָרָה, *gall*; they were like archers aiming for the gall bladder and liver, intending to destroy their victim permanently.

וישטמםו בעלי חצים — *The arrow-tongued men* [lit. *men of arrows*] *hated him*.

[A further allusion to his afore-referenced brothers, as well as Potiphar and his wife, who hated him.] They are called בעלי חצים, *men of arrows*, because their tongues were sharp as arrows. *Onkelos*, taking חצים to be related to the term מַחֲצֵה [*Num. 31:36*] meaning *half; division*, renders: קָרִי פְלִגְוִתָא, alluding to the hatred shown him by those who were designated to divide the inheritance with him [i.e., his brothers] (*Rashi*).^[1]

1. *Abarbanel* perceives in this verse the essence of why Joseph — noble though he was — could not aspire to be the leader of the family. Unlike Judah, whom the brothers recognized as their uncontested leader and who enjoyed undisputed popularity, Joseph provoked jealousy

- 49 23 They embittered him and became antagonists;
23-24 the arrow-tongued men hated him.
24 But his bow was firmly emplaced
and his arms were gilded,

Radak insists that the context of this chapter precludes the notion that Jacob meant to include the evil deeds of his children in this phrase [as Onkelos interprets]. That Jacob spoke in such a castigating way in the case of Reuben was only to explain why he was unfit for the firstborn's birthright; and, in the case of Simeon and Levi, to explain why he divided them. In our verse, accordingly, the reference must be to Potiphar and his wife [not to the brothers].

Targum Yonasan explains this stich to refer to the Egyptians who opposed Joseph's rise to power and slandered him to Pharaoh. They were jealous and tried to convince Pharaoh to dismiss him from his high post [see *comm.* to 41:21], but God watched over him, and protected him from their plots.

The Torah likens slander to arrows, as in the verse [Jeremiah 9:7]: *Their tongue is a sharpened arrow*; and *ibid.* v. 2: *They flee their tongues, their bow of falsehood* (Rashbam).

[The verb שטם has been discussed in 27:41.]

24. But, by the grace of God, he prevailed and rose to prominence...

וְתִשָּׁב בְּאֵיתֵי קֶשֶׁתוֹ — But his bow was firmly [lit. in firmness] emplaced.

Metaphorically: [notwithstanding the above], Joseph's power [as regent of Egypt] was firmly es-

tablished. קֶשֶׁתוֹ, his bow, alludes to his power (Rashi).

Rashbam explains the metaphor to depict how notwithstanding the 'bitter arrows of slander' to which the Egyptians subjected Joseph, he nevertheless rose to prominence because 'his bow was stronger than theirs.'

Onkelos, as explained by Rashi, interpretively paraphrases: Joseph's prophecy (i.e., the dreams he dreamt about his brothers) was fulfilled because he was faithful to the precepts of the Torah in secret. [Rashi remarks that the foregoing is not a literal rendering of any words in the Hebrew text but is Onkelos' elaboration of the implication. Rashi fits in the words as follows] ... The dreams were fulfilled [תִּשָּׁב, established] because the might of the Holy One, Blessed is He, שְׁאֵיתָנוּ שֶׁל הַקֹּדֶם, was his bow and his stronghold.

וְיָפִינוּ וְרָעִי יָרִי — And his arms [lit. arms of his hands] were gilded [from פָּז, fine gold (Rashi)].

— An allusion to the golden signet ring Pharaoh placed on Joseph's hand [41:42] (Rashi).¹²

Following Rashbam who continues the metaphor that Joseph's bow was strong: ... And his arms were supple as he mightily drew the bow to its fullest extent. The word וְיָפִינוּ in this context means: supple, pliant from the root פִּנּוּ as in II Samuel 6:16 מְפִיזוֹ, agile dancing.

and could not be expected to effectively lead his brothers.

And yet, as R' Munk observes, in grandeur of soul and in moral worth, Joseph was superior to Judah. It was he, not Judah, who is honored in Jewish tradition with the title of צַדִּיק, righteous one (Yoma 35b; see Overview to Vayeishev-Mikeitz). His father calls him here the crown among his brothers, the one who wears the diadem of moral perfection. This exceptional tribute from the dying Patriarch was earned by Joseph's strength of character and nobleness of heart, which he had demonstrated on two decisive occasions. Jacob discreetly recalls them through the euphemistic words he addresses next to Joseph.

2. Rashi proceeds to briefly cite the Rabbinic interpretation of this verse as it appears in the Talmud, Sotah 36b, and with some minor differences in the Midrash [887:7]. According to

ויחי מט/כה מִיְדֵי אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב מִשָּׁם רָעָה אֲבֹן מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל: מֵאֵל אֲבִיר וַיַּעֲזֹרֶךְ וְאֵת שְׂדֵי

אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב — *From the hands of the Mighty Power of Jacob.*

The above happened to him [from the hands] through the instrumentality of the Holy One, Blessed is He, who is the 'Mighty One' of Jacob (Rashi).

A shepherd, too, is called אֲבִיר. The continuity of the passage is: "Who bestowed all this upon you? — The Holy One, Who is אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב, the Shepherd of Israel — the 'God Who has been my [i.e. Jacob's]

Shepherd all my life until this day' [48:15]; — He has, through your greatness, sustained me in Egypt" (Rashbam).

מִשָּׁם רָעָה אֲבֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל — *From there, he shepherded the stone of Israel.*¹¹

From there, [i.e., from Joseph's God-given position as viceroy, or from his earlier status of hated and slandered person (see below)], Joseph rose to become the shepherd who cared for and provided sus-

that interpretation, this verse refers to the incident when Joseph controlled his urge for Potiphar's wife.

When she finally entrapped him alone in her house, as related in 39:12, Joseph's temptation grew great. As we learned there, his father's image appeared to him through the window and warned him against sinning with the evil woman.

Immediately אֲבִירָא קָשָׁתוּ, his 'bow' was relaxed in vigor, which according to R' Yochanan metaphorically depicts how Joseph's self control forced his passion to subside. וַיִּטְּסוּ וְרִיעֵי יָדָיו, and the seeds of his hands were scattered — he struck his hands into the ground so that his virility [lit. seed] was channeled forth between his fingernails [i.e., he bore all his weight on his fingers so his thoughts would focus on the excruciating pain, and his ardor would leave him (Rashi ad loc.)].

This cooling of Joseph's ardor occurred מִיְדֵי יַעֲקֹב, at the hands of [i.e. due to the effect of] the mighty one, Jacob, since, as noted, the image of Jacob appeared to Joseph and exhorted him, and thus, Joseph's demonstration of supreme inner strength was directly caused from afar by the Patriarch, the Rock of Israel, who influenced his son like a shepherd.

According to another interpretation in the Talmud, the contextual flow of this interpretation is: מִשָּׁם, from there, i.e. — by virtue of this incident, Joseph merited to become the Shepherd, i.e., provider; a stone of Israel. That is, his father's exhortation warned him that if he succumbed to her seduction he would forfeit the privilege of having his name inscribed with those of his brothers on the stones of the High Priest's breastplate [see comm. to 39:8, 12]. However, now that he controlled his passion, he merited a place among his brethren to become a stone among the stones of Israel (Rif in Ein Yaakov).

Comp. Targum Yonasan: "... And accordingly he became worthy of being a ruler, and of being associated in the engraving of the names upon the stones of Israel."

The Midrash relates v. 25 to this theme by interpreting: The strength to accomplish all of this [i.e. withstanding the enticements of Potiphar's wife] was from the God of your father Who helped you.

The Talmud [t. id.] concludes:

It has been taught that Joseph was worthy that twelve tribes should issue from him as they issued from his father Jacob, since the two were compared in many ways [see comm. to 37:2], but because his ardor [lit. seed] emerged from between his [ten] fingernails [his power to beget was diminished and he had only two children]. Nevertheless, [ten sons, who, added to Joseph's two, made the total of twelve] emerged from his brother Benjamin. All of these sons of Benjamin bore names which were associated with Joseph [as Rashi records in the comm. to 43:30 s.v. נִבְכְּרוּ]. (See Overview to Vayigash).

1. R' Hirsch juxtaposes this verse with the previous verse which depicts the brothers, the hating archers who shot their arrows at Joseph, and emphasizes how Joseph did not exploit the opportunity to take revenge against the guilty. Though a viceroy in Egypt with almost un-

- 49 from the hands of the Mighty Power of Jacob –
 25 from there, he shepherded the stone of Israel.
 25 [That was] from the God of your father
 and He will help you,
 and with Shaddai – and He will bless you

tenance for Jacob, the stone of Israel. The word אֶבֶן, stone, denotes kingship, the primary personage of the nation, as it does in Zechariah 4:7 (Rashi). [Comp. Psalms 118:22 where stone in that context metaphorically refers to David. See also footnote to previous verse.]

The sense is that Providence orchestrated events so that Joseph steadily rose in stature to finally become the one who 'shepherded the Stone of Israel'; that is, he became the one who provided for Jacob who is considered the primogenitor of Israel inasmuch as the twelve tribes descended from him (Tzeidah laDerech; Be'er Yitzchak).

Or following certain Midrashim, Joseph is called the 'Stone of Israel,' the sense being that Joseph rose from the lowly status of hated brother to be the shepherd, that is the provider and the cornerstone of the Israelite family.

Rashi writes that אֶבֶן is a contraction [hotarikon] of the words אב וָבֵן, father and son [an allusion, according to Midrash HaGadol, of how Joseph became the provider for both father and son] – Jacob and his sons. Onkelos interprets similarly [but according to him the subject of this phrase is God, the Mighty One of Jacob, referred to in the previous phrase, by Whose Will fathers and sons are nourished].

limited powers, he was still able to forgive. Instead of aiming his bow against his brothers, ותשב בִּצְלוֹתָו even though his arms were ornamented with the gold of royalty and his brothers were at his mercy. Joseph was able to do this because he perceived that his fate was guided by the Mighty One of his father Jacob, the Shepherd Who bestowed His solicitude upon the stone of Israel.

R' Hirsch continues that this stone was the one upon which Jacob had rested his head on the lonely mountain when he was fleeing from Esau, the same stone that he consecrated to become Beth-El, the cornerstone of the family dedicated to the service of God (וְהָאֵלֹהִים בֵּיתֵל (28:22).

Since then Jacob had never ceased to look upon it as the symbol not only of his deepest misery, but also of the marvelous Divine blessing which he had received in the dream. The blessing had been completely fulfilled and now, in the evening of his life, Yaakov gratefully recalled this "stone of Israel".

Continuing Rashbam: From there, i.e., your position of greatness in Egypt, God has caused you to be the shepherd – that is, provider – for the 'even' of Israel, the family of Israel, for Joseph had sustained his father and brothers. The term 'even' refers to 'av' [father] and family. The nun is paragogic [=linguistically superfluous] as is the mem of רִיקָם.

According to Radak and Sforno, אֶבֶן, stone, is a metaphor for the permanence of Israel, who survive like a stone, whether esteemed by the nations like a precious stone, or held in contempt by them like a common stone.

25. מֵאֵל אָבִיר וְיִצְחָק. – [That was] from the God of your father and He will help you.

All the foregoing blessings came to you from the God of your father – and He will help you [in the future as well (Midrash)] (Rashi).

R' Shmuel ben Chofni Gaon interprets this verse as a prayer with the following bracketed words implied: [I beseech] from the God of your father [that] He help you.

וְעִתָּה שְׂרֵי וְיִצְחָק. – And with Shaddai, and He will bless you.

– Rashi takes וְעִתָּה as a preposition meaning and with. He in-

ויחי
מט/כו

וַיִּבְרַךְ בְּרַכַּת שָׁמַיִם מֵעַל בְּרַכַּת תְּהוֹם
כו רִבְעַת תַּחַת בְּרַכַּת שְׂרָיִם וְרַחֵם: בְּרַכַּת
אָבִיךָ גִּבְרוֹ עַל-בְּרַכַּת הוֹרֵי עַד-תֵּאָנֹת

terprets, 'When you were tempted by Potiphar's wife, your heart was with Shaddai, and therefore — He will bless you.'

[The Name *Shaddai* depicts God in His Aspect of God Who is sufficient [יָי = sufficient] in granting His Mercies, and who has sufficient power to give (see *Rashi* to 43:14 and *comm.* to 17:1; 28:3 and 35:11).] The Name here, following *Rashi*, would accordingly imply: You were with *Shaddai*, and He, with His boundless sufficiency to grant mercy to every creature, will bless you.

— *Targum Yonasan* takes אָא as the indefinite article and interprets: ... And He Who is called *Shaddai* [All Sufficient] shall bless you.

In Joseph the Patriarch recognized the one son who had understood more deeply than the others the meaning of the moral mission of mankind. He is the true heir; the 'crown of his brothers.' His noble character and exceptional talents combine to make him the truly 'righteous one.' He merits the great title of *tzaddik* because at moments of great temptation Joseph mastered himself and remained faithful to his beliefs and to the God of his father. Accordingly, Jacob prays to the God of his father [מֵאֵל אָבִיךָ], asking that He continue to watch over Joseph (*R' Munk*).

The blessings He will grant you will be composed of:

בְּרַכַּת שָׁמַיִם מֵעַל — [With] blessings of heaven from above.

That is, with blessings of dew and rain in their proper times (*Radak*; *Onkelos* interprets similarly).

The expression *blessings of heaven from above* also carries a

connotation of those blessings which are beyond Nature, a super-natural increase of strength and personal worth (*Zohar*).

בְּרַכַּת תְּהוֹם רִבְעַת תַּחַת — *Blessings of the deep crouching below.*

The reference is to the subterranean fountains deep beneath the earth, which crouch, so to speak, as if they are waiting for the opportunity to gush forth and irrigate the land. The blessing was that Joseph's territory would be irrigated by these subterranean waters so that his vegetation and trees would lack no moisture even in times of little rainfall, and his land would be fertile (*Radak*).

[On תְּהוֹם, deep or abyss, see 1:2. At the time of the Flood, these waters are described in 7:11 as having 'burst forth' to inundate the land.]

Targum Yonasan renders: ... And with the good blessing of the fountains of the Deep, which ascend and clothe the herbage from below.

Following the *Zohar*: these refer to blessings of 'natural' abundance. He blessed him that the whole of Nature — unto the very core of the Deep, so to speak — would benefit him and his descendants.

בְּרַכַּת שְׂרָיִם וְרַחֵם — *Blessings of the bosom and womb.*

[The blessing of *bosom* is that all mothers will be able to provide their infants with sufficient nourishment; and the blessing of *womb* is that all pregnant woman will be able to carry their fetuses to full term and give birth without mishap.]

Onkelos renders: *blessings of fatherhood and motherhood*, meaning that the men and women of Joseph will be blessed so that none

- 49 [with] blessings of heaven from above,
 26 blessings of the deep crouching below,
 blessings of the bosom and womb.
 26 The blessings of your father surpassed
 the blessings of my fathers,

will be sterile or barren (Rashi).

Rashi explains how Onkelos sees an allusion to 'fatherhood' in the word שָׁנִים, which invariably means *bosom* or *breasts*. The Targum of the root שָׁנִים, to throw with force, is שָׁרִי (see Exodus 15:4). Accordingly, שָׁנִים can be understood as an allusion to male semen, which must move with velocity in order to fertilize the female ovum and cause conception.

Gur Aryeh offers a different explanation of Onkelos. The word שָׁנִים, meaning *bosom*, symbolizes the concept of 'giving' to someone else, just as a mother nurses her baby. Consequently, this word can be used to allude to the father's contribution to the process of conception.

R' Munk records that Joseph's sinful descendants eventually forfeited this blessing of bosom and womb. Into such depravity had the people of Ephraim fallen that the prophet Hoshea exclaimed — using a similar but contrary metaphor: 'Give them, HASHEM whatever You will give; give them a barren womb and dry bosom!' (Hoshea 9:14).

Targum Yonasan interprets this as referring to Rachel: ... The bosom at which you were nursed is blessed, and the womb in which you have lain.

This follows the Midrash which interprets that this blessing was aimed specifically at Rachel whom Jacob loved greatly. For even when Jacob blessed Joseph he treated him as but secondary to her, saying, *Blessed be the bosom that*

suckled you, and the womb from which you were nursed.

26. בְּרַכַּת אָבִיךָ עַל-בְּרַכַּת הוֹרִי
 — The blessings of your father surpassed the blessings of my fathers.

That is, the blessings with which God blessed me were greater in their extent and efficacy than those with which He blessed my father and grandfather (Rashi).

Rashi thus interprets blessings of your father to refer to the blessings which God had bestowed upon Jacob; the blessings of my fathers refer to the blessings which God bestowed upon Abraham and Isaac, and נָכְרוּ, *surpassed*, is in the past tense, meaning that Jacob had already been given more than the other Patriarchs.

Radak however, interprets the sense differently: 'The blessings of your father, i.e., those blessings which I [Jacob] now bestow upon you, will surpass my forefathers' blessings, i.e. the blessings which my forefathers bequeathed me.'

Comp. Onkelos: The blessing of your father [which I now bestow upon you] shall be added to the blessing with which my fathers blessed me.

The word הוֹרִי [lit. *my conceivers*] from the term הִרְיוֹן, *conception*, denotes those who caused one to be conceived in the mother's womb. Both parents are referred to by this term since they share in the conception (Rashi; Radak).

Rashbam interprets הוֹרִי [parents] in this context as related to הָר, *mountain*,

1. R' Hirsch rejects the views that Jacob would say that his blessings far surpass those of his forebears; such a statement would imply a conceit unbecoming of Jacob.

Rather, the sense would be: 'The blessings that I, your father, give you are powerful only because they are based upon the cumulative blessings my parents gave me. Because of their blessings, mine has strength. Do not be indifferent to parental blessings; that I can bless you now is due to the purity of my parents.'

ויחי מ/טכו גבעת עולם תהיין לראש יוסף ולקדקד נזיר אחיו

and it parallels the phrase *eternal hills* that follows in the next stich. The implication is: The blessing God bestowed upon me – that I will *spread out powerfully westward, eastward, northward and southward* (28:19), is a blessing that *exceeds the boundaries of mountains*, more, indeed, than all the mountains of the world. Moses' later blessing supports this view of the passage, because he, too, drew a parallel between mountains and hills. Moses declared [Deut. 33:14]: *ומראש הררי קדם וממזר גבעות עולם* *things of the ancient mountains for the precious things of the eternal hills*. Jacob concluded, too, with a similar formula: *תבואתה לראש יוסף ולקדקד נזיר אחיו*. *Let them [i.e. these blessings] come upon Joseph's head, and on the head of one who was separated from his brothers* [ibid. v. 16].

To the eternal bounds of the world's hills.

– I.e., the blessings I received were unlimited, figuratively expanding to the furthest hills in the world. As it is written in the blessing God gave Jacob [28:14]: *And you shall spread out powerfully westward, eastward, northward and southward* – an unbounded blessing which was given to neither Abraham nor Isaac. Abraham was promised only the Land of Israel, as it is said [13:14]: *'Raise now your eyes and look out from where you are: northward, southward, eastward and westward. For all the land that you see, to you will I give it ...'* but God showed Abraham only Eretz Yisrael. To Isaac He said [26:23]: *For to you and your offspring will I give all these lands and establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father*. This was Isaiah's intent when he said [Isaiah

48:14]: *'I will feed you with the inheritance of Jacob your father [i.e. a boundless inheritance]*, and he did not say, *'the inheritance of Abraham'* [which was less extensive] (Rashi).

The translation of *תאנן* as *bounds, ends*, follows Rashi who relates it to the verbs *והתאננתם* meaning *mark off boundaries*, in Numbers 34:8, 10.

Onkelos interpretively paraphrases: *'... [May your father's blessings be added to those with which my fathers blessed me] of which the great ones of the world were desirous.'* The Patriarchs are described figuratively as *גבעות עולם*, the *towering hills of the world*, because they overshadowed lesser people. Jacob's mother, Rebecca, desired Isaac's blessings so much that she compelled Jacob to resort to devious means to obtain him (Rashi).

Rashi explains that Onkelos derived this interpretation by rendering *תאנן* as *desire* and *גבעת עולם* [lit. the world's hills] as figuratively referring to the *great* [i.e. 'lofty'] *ones of the world*. [Onkelos would render the Hebrew syntax: *Until the desire of the great ones of the world.*]

According to Targum Yonasan the implication is: *'... May the blessings of your father be added to the blessings given me by my fathers Abraham and Isaac and which the great ones of the world, Ishmael, Esau and all the sons of Keturah, have desired.'*

[Thus, Targum Yonasan figuratively refers *גבעת עולם*, 'great ones of the world' to Ishmael and Esau who coveted these blessings, while Rashi interprets the reference in Onkelos to allude to Rebecca who encouraged Jacob to get the blessings. Shaarei Aharon records that this is in keeping with Rashi's interpretation throughout Scripture that *גבעות*, hills, is a metaphor for the Patriarchs. See, for example, Rashi's comm. to Numbers 23:9; Micah 6:1. See also Rosh Hashanah 11a. Paane'ach Raza interprets similarly, and adds that therefore the word *גבעת* is spelled 'defectively' (without the

to the endless bounds of the world's hills.
 Let them be upon Joseph's head
 and upon the head of the exile from his brothers.

plural 1), to give it the connotation of the singular as a reference to Rebecca.]

Radak renders: 'May the blessings of your father in conjunction with the blessings my forefathers bestowed upon me be yours and your descendants until the boundaries of the eternal hills,' i.e., for all time. עולם here has the meaning not of the physical world but of timeless eternity. Jacob chose hills and mountains for this metaphor since they have an aura of timelessness about them. Accordingly, Jacob's blessing was one which knew no bounds in either geography or duration.'

תהיין לראש יוסף — Let them [i.e. all (the aforementioned blessings) (Rashi)] be upon Joseph's head.

Targum Yonasan: 'May all these blessings form a diadem of majesty for the head of Joseph ...'

The contextual flow is: Many great people have desired these blessings. But I am now declaring that all of them — mine and my forebears' blessings — devolve upon Joseph's head since he was the most consecrated of his brothers and was separated from them for so long (Akeidas Yitzchak).

וְלִקְדֵּךְ נְוִיר אָחִי — [And] upon the head of the exile from his brothers.

The translation of נְוִיר אָחִי as the exile from his brothers refers to Joseph as the one who was separated from his family [first during his twenty two years of isolation and then by virtue of his duties in the palace]. This rendering follows Onkelos [פְּרִישָׁא נְאֻחֵיהּ] as explained by Rashi, who cites similar

meanings of the root נָוַר, separate, in Leviticus 22:2 and Isaiah 1:4.^[1]

Targum Yonasan apparently interprets the word נְוִיר as related to וָרַר and renders: '... [let the blessings be a diadem] for the brow of the man who became chief and ruler in Egypt, and the brightness [וְהוֹרֵר] of the glory of his brothers.'

Rashbam interprets: The king [metaphorically: the crown from the cognate noun נָוַר] over his brothers.

Ralbag perceives the meaning to be: the most abstinent of his brothers, that is, the brother who exercised the greatest control over his emotions, and abstained from sin under the most trying circumstances.

[R' Avraham ben HaRambam mentions that the comparative aspect of this description is indicated by the construct [סְמִיכוּת] state of the words. Jacob does not refer to him as נְוִיר, an abstinent person; instead Jacob compares him with the rest of the family, describing him as אָחִי, the most abstinent of his brothers. The implication is that his brothers, too, experienced self-control, but he was the most abstinent of all.]

Jacob, as noted, thus alludes to Joseph as the one who wears, unseen by others, the diadem of moral perfection. Only Joseph, not his brothers, earned the title righteous one [see Yoma 35b; Overview to Vayeishev].

As R' Munk notes, Joseph's primary moral victory over himself was in maintaining his unblemished morality in Egypt, despite the daily temptations from all sides. 'Each day,' exclaims R' Yochanan, 'God Himself praises the virtue of the bachelor who lives in a large

1. The Talmud, [Shabbos 139a] derives from the description of Joseph here as nazir [which in other contexts refers to one who has vowed to abstain from wine and strong drink], that for the entire twenty-two years that Jacob was separated from his brothers he did not taste any wine [to symbolize his grief]. [See comm. to end of 43:34 where it is indicated that the brothers, too, refrained from wine during this period.]

ויחי כו ששי בן־מין זאב יטרף בפקר זאכל עד
מט/כו־כח ב ולערב יחלק שלל: כל־אלה שבטי
ישראל שנים עשר וזאת אשר־דבר

town without yielding to sin' (*Pesachim* 113a). Egypt was the land where moral perversion and sexual license were practiced in their lowest form, as the Torah itself attests (*Leviticus* 18:3). But Joseph remained supremely unaffected by the debauchery surrounding him. He was able to resist the constant temptations of his master's wife even though she threatened him with death.

קרקר refers to the *cranium*, the vertex — the top — of the head. Figuratively it means the 'crown' of the head (*Ibn Janach; Radak*).

27. Benjamin.

Benjamin is a predatory wolf [lit. a wolf who tears (its prey)].

The metaphor of a ravenous wolf that seizes prey is a prophetic allusion to two incidents in the life of Benjamin's descendants:

a) On the aftermath of the incident of the Concubine at Gibeah, the young men of Benjamin had to seize wives in a 'wolf-like' manner [see *Judges* 21];

b) King Saul [Benjamin's descendant] conquered his enemies on all sides: As recorded in *I Samuel* 14:48, he consolidated his reign, fought against Moab and against Edom, and wherever he went he wrought havoc [like a ravenous wolf] (*Rashi*).

The tribe of Benjamin will be like a wolf, which preys on other animals and beasts and which is the most fearless of animals to enter human habitations. Benjamin's descendants were mighty, fearless warriors, and so they are depicted in the affair of the Concubine at Gibeah [*Judges* chaps. 19-20] (*Radak*).

Midrash HaGadol perceives this ascription of rapacity to be a reference

to the warlike Ehud, a descendant of Benjamin, who 'snatched the soul' of Eglon and killed him [i.e., by a subterfuge (see *Judges* 3:20)].

The phrase which literally reads: *Benjamin a wolf will tear* could be interpreted with *wolf* as the object to mean *Benjamin shall tear a wolf*,* or: *Benjamin shall be torn by a wolf*. *Rashi* therefore makes the comment that the word *אשר* is elliptically understood before *יטרף*, and the phrase should be interpreted as if it read *אשר יטרף* *Benjamin is a wolf that shall tear*, or *Benjamin is a wolf inasmuch as he* [Benjamin] preys like a wolf (*Mizrachi; Gur Aryeh; Maharshal*).

In consonance with his theme that each testament alluded to the trait that disqualified that particular tribe from disputing Judah's rights to the throne, *Abarbanel* notes that Benjamin's characteristic of relative rapacity was contrary to the quality needed to rule the nation. Even the great and righteous Joseph was disqualified because he was hated by the others. Of all the brothers, only Judah was fit to rule.

בפקר זאכל עד — *In the morning he will devour prey.*

He is always ready to fight and will be successful in his wars ...

This is a further reference to Saul who rose as Israel's champion during the 'morning' of national existence — when Israel began to flourish and shine (*Rashi* from *Tanchuma*).

In this respect Benjamin even exceeded the wolf. The wolf, as noted

* *R' Hirsch* indeed interprets the verse to mean *Benjamin will tear the 'wolf' to pieces*. He explains this as a reference to the tradition that at the end of the final exile, Amalek will be overcome by a descendant of Rachel. Thus, Benjamin will be the one to tear the Amalekite 'wolf' and bring about the Redemption of Israel.

49 27 Benjamin is a predatory wolf;
27-28 in the morning he will devour prey
and in the evening he will distribute spoils."

28 All these are the tribes of Israel — twelve — and

in *Zephaniah* 3:3, tears its prey in the evening while Benjamin will devour the spoil of his enemies in the 'morning,' a reference to Saul's wars against Amalek and the other nations — as well as in the 'evening,' a reference to Mordechai's triumph over Haman (*Radak*).

ער is synonymous with שָׁלַל, spoils, and בָּזָה, booty. *Onkelos* renders it עָרָא. It occurs in *Isaiah* 33:23 עָרָא עַד שָׁלַל שָׁלַל, Then the prey of the spoils was divided (*Rashi*).

וְלַעֲרֹב יִחַלֵּק שָׁלַל — And in the evening he will distribute spoils.

Even in the dark evening of Israel's history, when Nebuchadnezzar will have exiled them to Babylon, he [i.e. the descendants of Benjamin] will still divide the spoils, of victory. This is an allusion to Mordechai and Esther, of the tribe of Benjamin, who divided the spoils of Haman [see *Esther* 3:7] (*Rashi*).

Radak also interprets this prophecy as an allusion to the triumph of Mordechai. He explains that the period is called 'evening' because exile is likened to the evening darkness.

Comp. the view of R' Pinchas in the Midrash who interprets that the metaphor alludes to the altar [in the Temple, which was in Benjamin's territory]. As the wolf seizes its prey, so did the altar 'seize' the sacrifices which were offered on it. In the morning he [i.e. it=the altar] devours the prey, alludes to the lamb that was offered in the morning [Num. 28:4]; in the evening it divides the spoils, alludes to the other lamb that was offered at dusk [ibid.].

Rashi continues that *Onkelos* interpretatively perceives the metaphor as a reference to the 'booty' — the Priestly portion — which the *Kohanim* received from the holy sacrifices in the Temple [which was situated in the territory of Benjamin].

The following is *Onkelos'* full interpretive rendering of Benjamin's benediction: 'Benjamin: In his land will dwell the Divine Presence; in his territory will the Temple [other versions read: Altar] be built. In the morning and evening will the Priests offer the oblations and in the evening divide the remaining portions of the residue of the sacred things.'

Actually, *Onkelos* is offering two interpretations: that the Divine Presence will be located in Benjamin's territory, and that the Temple Altar will be there; see Midrash below. The basic metaphor in consonance with that Midrash alludes to the consumption of the sacrifices on the altar in the Temple; the Divine Presence refers to the Heavenly Fire which consumed the sacrifices. [For a clearer understanding of *Onkelos'* interpretation see the controversy of Rav and Levi in *Zevachim* 54a; see also *Rashi* ibid. 53b s.v. שִׁדְרָה, and *Nesinah LaGer*.]

כָּל־אֵלֶּה שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר
— All these are the tribes of Israel — twelve.

The Torah makes a point of reaffirming the number twelve, already established in 35:22, since the tribe of Joseph had since been divided into two. The connotation of the passage is:

Only the aforementioned — [and not Ephraim and Manasseh] — are truly accounted as the 'twelve' full-fledged tribes of Israel. These are the twelve whose names were later inscribed on the High Priest's breastplate; these participated in the

ויחי מט/כט

לָהֶם אֲבִיהֶם וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם אִישׁ אֶשֶׁר
כָּבֵדְתָּו בְּרַךְ אֹתָם: וַיְצַו אוֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר

covenant of the blessings and curses at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, and it was corresponding to *these* twelve tribes that twelve stones were set up by Moses on the east of the Jordan, by Joshua in the dry bed of the Jordan and later at Gilgal, and by Elijah on Mount Carmel. Manasseh and Ephraim, however, did not rank among the tribes except with respect to the division of the Land and the separate tribal encampments in the Wilderness. In these two instances, Levi was not counted among the tribes because the Levites, as the servants of God, had no territorial allotment in Eretz Yisrael; see Deut. 18:1. In such cases, the tribe of Joseph was counted as two — Manasseh and Ephraim — so that the number of tribes would remain at twelve (Sforno).

What is the connotation of *כל אלה*, all these, when the Torah could have simply written *אלה*, these? Possibly the expression *all these*, the twelve tribes of Israel conveys the intimation that *all things* that exist in the world exist by the merit of the twelve tribes. The expression *all these* alludes to the expression in Isaiah 66:2: *All these things* [i.e. Heaven, earth, and all Creation] *has My hand made* (R' Bachya).

וזאת אשר יברך להם אביהם וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם — And this¹ is what their father spoke to them [lit. and]

he blessed them.

But surely [as appears evident from some of the preceding verses] Jacob did not *bless* some of his sons but to the contrary scolded them! Actually, the Torah could have summed up this narrative by merely stating, *And this* — i.e., what we have just read in the preceding narrative — *is what their father spoke to them*. If such were the case, however, we might conclude that Jacob gave no blessing at all to Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. To prevent such a misapprehension, the Torah specifically added: *When* [lit. and] *he blessed them*, to emphasize that he indeed blessed *all* of them (Rashi).

This needs clarification. For how are we to take the earlier rebukes to Reuben, Simeon, and Levi as *blessings*?

— Or HaChaim explains that even Jacob's rebukes were truly blessings. By addressing Reuben as his *firstborn*, Jacob gave him the implied assurance that in Messianic times, when the firstborn would share the sacred service with the Levites, Reuben would regain part of his privileges. As for Simeon and Levi, Jacob cursed only their excessive anger, but they would remain like all the others. Even the dispersion Jacob decreed upon Simeon and Levi was designed only to rid them of their aggressiveness.

1. The word *זאת* this, is not very common in Scripture, and the Sages in the Midrash expound upon its use here in the summation of Jacob's blessing:

Moses' later blessing of the Children of Israel is introduced with the words *וזאת הברכה*, and this is the blessing which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel. The Torah's use of the word *זאת* at the conclusion of Jacob's blessings implies that Moses commenced his blessing where Jacob left off [thus emphasizing the continuity and progressive aspects of the blessings; they were not separate and unrelated, but parts of the continuing development of Israel] (Tanchuma Yashan).

וְזֶאת בְּאֵר אֶהְיֶה אֵלֶיְהֶם — With 'this' shall Aaron come to the Sanctuary [Lev. 16:3]. R' Yitzchak said: the word *זאת*, this, is an allusion to the twelve Tribes of Israel [our verse is cited]. The passage in *Leviticus* alludes to the merit of the twelve Tribal Ancestors, which accompanied Aaron when he ministered in the Temple (Pesikta Rabbasi 47).

49 this is what their father spoke to them when he
28 blessed them. He blessed each according to his appropriate blessing.

— *Sechel Tov* explains that the three rebuked sons understood the underlying blessing implicit in Jacob's words. They could have expected him to expel them from the nation of Israel; instead, he took away privileges that might have been due them — but this included the implied blessing that they remain part of Israel.

According to other commentators, [e.g. *Ibn Ezra* to v. 1, *Sforno* here], Reuben, Simeon and Levi were not blessed in the foregoing testament. Rather, the implication of our verse is that the foregoing is what their father 'spoke' to them — the Hebrew verb for spoke, דבר, denoting sternness — נִיבֶרֶךְ אֹתָם, and then he blessed them with an unrecorded blessing, apart from what was written in this chapter.

אִישׁ אֶשֶׁר בִּבְרַכְתּוֹ בְּכֶן אֹתָם — He blessed each according to his appropriate blessing [lit. man according to his blessing he blessed them].

He blessed each according to the blessing destined to befall him. He did not bless all with a common blessing, but gave each a unique one. The future would prove the prophetic veracity of his benedictions (*Ramban* to 41:12).

— He blessed each according to his unique requirements. For example, Judah's blessing was related to the monarchy, Issachar's to Torah-study, etc. (*Sforno*).

As *R' Munk* writes, Jacob did not give a single, uniform blessing to all families of Israel. Though the nation must be unified, each of its component tribes has its separate function; thus, Israel is a pluralistic people with each tribe having a mission suited to its par-

ticular character and location. Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh specialized in cattle-raising and grazing [*Numbers* 32:1-4], Simeon provided scribes and teachers, Levi provided clergy, Judah royalty, Ephraim and Benjamin had the best soldiers [*Psalms* 80:3], Zebulun specialized in commerce and supported the scholarly tribe of Issachar, Asher and Naftali excelled in agriculture and the latter produced orators as well. Finally, Dan [*Pesachim* 4a] was known for its judicial competence.

Rashi observes: We would normally have expected the verse to read אִישׁ אֶשֶׁר בִּבְרַכְתּוֹ בְּכֶן אֹתוֹ, lit. each according to his blessing he blessed him. Phrased as it is ... he blessed them, the intimation is: Included in the personal blessing he bestowed upon each of them individually — for example, ascribing to Judah the strength of the lion, to Benjamin the rapacity of the wolf, to Naftali the fleetness of a deer — he included them all in a general blessing. [That is, every individual blessing applied to them all, extending all the blessings to each and every one of them, so that each of them benefited by and possessed the combined qualities of all the blessings. While each individual tribe excelled in its particular quality, all the tribes shared in all the national blessings.]

The *Midrash* elaborates: ... Jacob in effect declared them all strong as lions, rapacious as wolves, fleet as deer. That each of the Tribal Ancestors was endowed with the others' unique characteristics is corroborated by Moses' later blessing, in which, for example, he referred to Dan as a lion while Jacob had referred to him as a serpent. ...

וַיְחִי מֵט-לֹא אֲלֵהֶם אֲנִי נֶאֱסָף אֶל-עַמִּי קִבְּרוּ אֹתִי
 אֶל-אֲבֹתַי אֶל-הַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׂדֶה
 לַעֲפְרֹן הַחִתִּי בַּמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׂדֶה
 הַמְּכַפֶּלָה אֲשֶׁר-עַל-פְּנֵי מִמְרָא בְּאֶרֶץ
 כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר קָנָה אֲבֹרָהֶם אֶת-הַשְּׂדֵה
 לֹא מֵאֵת עֲפְרֹן הַחִתִּי לְאַחֲזֹת-קִבְּרִי: שְׁמָה

29. Jacob's final command.

וַיֹּצֵא אוֹתָם — *Then he instructed them.*

According to Malbim and others, this phrase does not introduce the following subject, in which Jacob gave instructions regarding his burial. Rather, this phrase connotes that he gave them general instructions — which the Torah did not record — on how they should conduct themselves. Among these instructions was his command regarding the burial. [Therefore the next phrase starts independently with וַיֹּאמֶר, *and he said*; to indicate that it is separate.]

אֲנִי נֶאֱסָף אֶל-עַמִּי — *I am about to be gathered to my people.*

This expression is used to denote death because then the souls are 'gathered' into their place of concealment (*Rashi*).

The verb אָסַף, *gather*, often connotes the ingathering of an object to its proper place. See *Judges* 19:15; *Deut.* 22:2. *Lev.* 23:39. Whenever it is stated in reference to death it connotes this ingathering of souls (*Rashi*).

[See also *comm.* to וַיֹּאסֶף אֶל עַמִּי above 25:8, where many interpretations are cited. Among them: the deceased joins his ancestors in death; the reunification of the soul with the Upper Worlds; the classification of the departed with others of like character; the gathering into the 'bond of eternal life' with the righteous of all generations who are referred to as עַם, *people*, because they are similar to him.]

קִבְּרוּ אֹתִי אֶל-אֲבֹתַי — *Bury me with my fathers.*

So that in addition to my soul being united with them, my body, too, will be with them (*Malbim*).

[The word קִבְּרוּ, *bury*, is in plural.] Although Jacob had already imposed an oath upon Joseph about this matter, he now gave them *all* the duty of burying him in the Cave of Machpelah, because he was apprehensive that Pharaoh might forbid Joseph to leave the country. Jacob's apprehension was quite justified for we see that Joseph had to plead with the royal courtiers to intercede with Pharaoh for permission to go. Pharaoh consented only because Jacob had imposed an oath (*Ramban*; see further 50:4).

The translation of אֵל, lit. *to*, as *with* follows *Rashi*. In an alternate interpretation, *Ramban* concurs citing *Levit.* 8:18: אִשָּׁה אֶל אָחֹתָהּ, *a woman with her sister*, where אֵל similarly means *with* [see below].

אֶל-הַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׂדֶה עֲפְרֹן הַחִתִּי — *In the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite.*

[That is, in the field that had once belonged to Ephron the Hittite.]

The translation of אֵל [lit. *to*] in this phrase as *in* follows *Ramban* who cites the similar idiomatic usage above in 23:19. Compare also *Exodus* 25:21 וְאֵל-הָאָרֶץ, 'in the ark.'

In his primary interpretation however, *Ramban* suggests that the

²⁹ Then he instructed them; and he said to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite. ³⁰ In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which faces Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as an estate for a burial site.

dual usage of *אֵל* in this verse is elliptic and should be understood to mean: *Bury me* [i.e., inter me in a casket] and *carry me to my fathers to the cave*.

30. *במערה אשר בשדה המכפלה אשר על פני מקרא בארץ כנען* — *In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah which faces Mamre, in the land of Canaan.*

[The terms in this verse have been fully explained in the commentary to 23:17-20.

[Jacob proceeds to go into great detail about the burial site. Seventeen years had elapsed since the family had left the land of Canaan, so he was very specific in informing his sons about its location and his rights to the property.

[As culled from the commentators, Jacob was apprehensive that in the course of the years since they left Canaan, someone might have seized the cave (as happened to the Shunammite woman whose house had been seized during her absence; see *II Kings* 8:2), or that its precise location would be forgotten. He said, *in the cave*, but they might not have understood which cave he meant, so he added *which was in the field of Machpelah*, thus defining its location. To identify the region he added *which faces Mamre*, i.e. the city — another name for Hebron, and more specifically (as *Rashi* writes in 35:27) it is the name of the plain which lay before

the city. To complete the geographic description, Jacob mentions *in the land of Canaan*.]

אשר קנה אברהם את השדה מאת עפרון — החתי לאחותו קבר — *Which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as an estate for a burial site.*

Therefore my right to be buried there cannot be disputed (*Rashbam*).

Jacob's intention in mentioning all of this about the site was to impress them with its importance. He wanted them to understand that Abraham had purchased the cave for a specific reason, and that he had commanded that it be their burial ground as an everlasting possession (*Ramban*). [See further, 50:13.]

The details in this verse were in anticipation of their possible apprehension: Should you fear that someone will contest your right to the site, be aware it is the cave *which Abraham bought, together with the field*; furthermore, it was not bought from an unauthorized person, but from *Ephron the Hittite*, who was the chief and had every right to sell it. Have no fear that Abraham bought it for farming; he purchased it specifically as *an estate for a burial site* and designated that it be used exclusively for this purpose (*Hadar Zekeinim; Abarbanel; Malbim*).

ויחי מט/לב-ג קברו את-אברהם ואת שרה אשתו
שמה קברו את-יצחק ואת רבקה אשתו
לב ושמה קברתי את-לאה: מקנה השנה
ג והמערה אשר-בו מאת בני-חתי: ויכל

31. שמה קברו אברהם ואת שרה אשתו — *There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife.*

Thus, demonstrating that the sale had been confirmed in *practice*, actual possession was taken of the cave (*Hadar Zekeinim*), and its use confirmed its intended purpose (*Alshich*).

By evoking this memory of those interred there, Jacob hoped to inspire his sons with the significance of the place and make them even more zealous in carrying out his command to bury him there. Jacob also wanted it understood that only the three couples were to be buried there — beginning with Abraham and Sarah and terminating with Jacob himself. [See below and further 50:5] (*Ramban*).

Sechel Tov notes that although Sarah and Rebecca died before their respective husbands, Jacob mentioned the males first to accord them honor.

[The subject of this phrase is not mentioned. Who buried them? As

Rashi notes in his *comm.* to 41:13 s.v. אתי השיב, the unnamed subjects in an elliptic Scriptural verse are always the ones with the power to perform that particular action, or to those who are described earlier as having performed that action. In this case the inferred subjects are Abraham who buried Sarah (23:19), and Isaac and Ishmael who buried Abraham (25:9).]

שמה קברו את יצחק ואת רבקה אשתו — *There they buried Isaac and Rebecca his wife.*^[1]

Jacob mentioned this as proof that possession of the cave passed on to Isaac and his children; it was meant to preclude any possible claims by the descendants of Ishmael that the cave was *their* inheritance from Abraham (*Hadar Zekeinim*; *Abarbanel*).

'Furthermore, it is only proper that I should wish to be buried near my parents' (*Haamek Davar*).

Jacob used the abstract expression *they buried* rather than *I buried* [as in the case of Leah] because Esau had par-

1. Why did Jacob mention his parents by name?

The prohibition of calling a parent by name even after their death [*Kiddushin* 41b] applies only to cases where one simply mentions them by name, without a title. But if their name is preceded by 'father' or 'mother' it is not considered an impropriety and is permitted, as in the case of the Talmudic usage of Abba ['father'] Chalafta, Yannai Abba [see *GRA* to *Yoreh Deah* 242 § 34.] Therefore, having prefaced his statement by saying *Bury me with my 'fathers'* [v. 29], Jacob could now name them without impropriety.

However Joseph's mention of Jacob by name [further, 50:24] and Isaac, of Abraham in 28:4, needs clarification. Perhaps the rule does not apply to the Patriarchs since their names in themselves are exalted and God Himself assigned their names, which undoubtedly attest to their spiritual superiority. It is accordingly an honor for their ancestors to refer to them by such august, Divinely sanctioned names. [See also *Me'am Loez* cited in footnote to v. 1.]

Support for this may be adduced from the Talmud, [*Yoma* 38] where we learn that one should not give a child the name of a wicked person. *Ritua* rules we may use the name of Ishmael since even God referred to him by name. [Therefore, it is certainly proper to refer to the Patriarchs by name] (*HaKasav V'HaKaballah*).

49 ³¹There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife;
31-32 there they buried Isaac and Rebecca his wife; and
there I buried Leah. ³² Purchase of the field and the
cave within it was from the sons of Heth."

participated in the burial of Isaac [35:29], and Jacob did not want to mention Esau's name. Moreover, he did not say 'we buried' since he would then have had to elaborate by clarifying: 'there we buried Isaac, and there they buried Rebecca,' since Jacob was on his way home from Laban when his mother was buried. [Presumably Esau and other members of the household buried her; as Ramban writes in 35:8, the blind Isaac could not even participate.]

וַשָּׂמָה קָבְרָתִי אֶחָלָהּ — And there I buried Leah.

— 'Accordingly I have already established possession of it' [and it would not be fitting for anyone but me, her husband, to be buried there with her (*Tz'ror HaMor*)]. Jacob said this with Esau in mind, lest Esau and his children claim the cave and maintain that it was his right as firstborn that he be the only son buried there with his ancestors. Moreover, it was clear that both

could not be buried there. This apprehension was also the purport of Jacob's words [cited by Joseph in 50:5]: *In my grave which I have hewn for myself*, meaning that he had already prepared his own sepulchre there (Ramban).

[Jacob's apprehension was well-founded, for indeed, the Rabbis in *Sotah* 13a record that there was a quarrel with Esau at the cave prior to Jacob's burial. See *Rashi* to v. 21 above, and footnote to 50:13.]

32. מְקוֹנָה הַשָּׂמָה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ
מֵאֵחַ בְּנֵי חֵת — Purchase of the field
and the cave within it was from the
sons of Heth.

Jacob mentioned this last point to put his sons' minds at ease on one final matter: Ephron had been the chief of the city when he sold the site to Abraham. The brothers might have been apprehensive that the townsfolk possibly were unhap-

1. When did Leah die? Why didn't Esau quarrel when Leah was buried?

This is the first and only reference in the Torah to Leah's death. The Torah is not, as has often been emphasized, a history book. It recorded only those events God deemed necessary for us to know; apparently the time and circumstances of Leah's death did not fit into this category.

According to the authoritative *Seder Olam*, Leah died at the age of 45, at the time Joseph was sold. This was yet another one of the misfortunes Jacob experienced during that period.

[Several interesting chronological details emerge from the fact that Leah's death coincided with Joseph's sale:

1. The year was 2216 from Creation.
2. Leah survived Rachel, who died in 2207 as Jacob returned to Canaan, by only 9 years.
3. Leah died twelve years before Isaac, who, as noted in the *comm.* to 37:29 and 37:2, lived twelve years after Joseph's sale.
4. Jacob, who died at the age of 147 in the year 2255, outlived Leah by 39 years, and Rachel by 48 years.
5. The sequence of the deaths of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs were:
Sarah, Abraham, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Isaac, Jacob.

[When I mentioned the above chronology to R' David Feinstein, he suggested that point 3, that Isaac was still alive when Jacob buried Leah, would account for why Esau did not try to stop Jacob from burying her in the Cave. As long as either of his parents was alive, Esau was solicitous of their feelings and would not defy Isaac's wishes regarding the cave. It was only at Jacob's burial, after their father was dead, that Esau dared show his true colors.]

וַיַּחַי אֶת־בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר רַגְלָיו אֶל־
אֶת־הַמָּטָה וַיִּגָּזַע וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עַמּוּנוֹ: וַיִּפֹּל יוֹסֵף

py with the sale of a Hittite property to a foreigner as a gravesite, but could not resist because Ephron was their leader. Now that Ephron was dead they might contest the sale and try to prevent Jacob's burial. Jacob therefore assured them that the sale was from the sons of Heth — they all consented to the sale unequivocally (*Hadar Zekeinim; Abarbanel; Chizkuni*). [See comm. to 23:20.]

According to the Talmud [*Sotah* 13a] Jacob even possessed a deed for the property. [See footnote to 50:13.]

33. Jacob dies.

וַיִּכַּל וַיֹּצֵב לְצִוּוֹת אֶת־בָּנָיו — When Jacob finished instructing [lit. to command] his sons.

He is likened to one about to embark on a journey and who first sets his house in order and instructs his family how to act in his absence (*Pesikta; Malbim*).^[1]

'Fortunate are the righteous,' proclaim the Sages in the Midrash, 'who do not depart from the world

until they have charged their sons!'

The syntax makes it clear that only after Jacob finished his charge to his sons did he draw his feet into the bed and return his soul to his Maker. This indicates that death had no power over Jacob; and he was entirely in control of his body. This is the implication of the Sages' statement [see *Rashi* below]: 'Jacob our father did not die,' for had death had power over him he would not have been able to delay his demise until the moment he concluded his final instructions and willfully drew his feet onto the bed (*Alshich; Or HaChaim*).^[2]

The sense of the expression is that he drew his legs onto the bed, this being the meaning in this context of אָסַף [usually translated gathered; see on v. 29] (*Rashi*).

Until this point Jacob had been sitting up on the bed with his feet on the ground. He now raised his feet and lay down (*Ibn Ezra; Rashbam*).

[Continuing *Malbim's* simile of a man embarking upon a journey]:

1. The Midrashim preserve some of the additional instructions Jacob gave his sons at the time:

"When you carry me up, do so reverently and respectfully; no one who is uncircumcised may touch my bier so as not to drive away the Divine Presence. Also, let no one of my descendants who married a Canaanite woman touch my bier. Let Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun be its bearers on the east; Reuben, Simeon, and Gad on the south; Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin on the west; and Dan, Asher, and Naftali on the north. In a similar order will your tribes be grouped some time in the future under four standards in the desert with the Divine Presence in the center."

Jacob insisted that Joseph not carry his bier since he was a monarch; also that it would be improper for Levi — whose descendants were destined to carry the Holy Ark — to carry Jacob's remains.

2. 'One dies only from inactivity.'

R' Tarfon in *Avos d'Rabbi Nosson* interprets our verse to teach that 'One dies only from inactivity.'

Yalkut Yehudah explains R' Tarfon's comment to mean that as long as Jacob still had the task of instructing his children before him, he stayed alive; when he finished charging them and was left idle — only then could death overtake him.

49 ³³ When Jacob finished instructing his sons, he
33 drew his feet into the bed. He expired and was
gathered to his people.

Jacob placed his feet on his sickbed, which was like a vehicle that would take him to his destination.

וַיָּגָע וַיִּצְקֵהוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל — He expired and was gathered to his people.

[As explained at length in the *comm.* to 25:8, this expression refers to quick death without prolonged sickness or pain; this is the death enjoyed by the righteous. It is a death that, according to some, comes unexpectedly, while one is even alert enough to carry on a conversation. According to others it refers to a state of unconsciousness preceding death, hence the term *נִיָּגָע*, expired, lit. *shriveled* (like something deflated), which colloquially has the connotation of 'he breathed his last'].

— It depicts the moment that the soul leaves the body (*Malbim*).

וַיִּצְקֵהוּ Jacob lives on.

[In recording the passing of Abraham (25:8) and Isaac (35:29), the Torah uses a similar expression with the addition of the word *וַיָּמָת*, and he died.] However, the term 'death' *per se* is not mentioned in this case. Our Rabbis [*Taanis* 5b] accordingly, said, 'Jacob our father is not dead' (*Rashi*).

The full text of this Rabbinic interpretation in *Taanis* 5b follows:

"R' Yochanan said: Our Father Jacob did not die." R' Nachman retorted to R' Yitzchak: 'Was it for nothing that the mourners mourned, the embalmers embalmed and the grave-diggers buried?' He replied, 'It is a Biblical verse which I expound [*Jeremiah* 30:10]: 'Therefore, do not fear O Jacob My servant,' said

HASHEM 'and do not be dismayed, O Israel: for I will save you from afar, and your descendants from captivity.' Jacob is thus equated with his descendants: Just as his descendants live on so does he.

Rashi there explains that the intimation of *Jeremiah's* prophecy was that Jacob would be 'brought' into Exile in order to witness the redemption of his descendants. This was indeed the case in Egypt where the Sages expound that the passage וַיִּצְקֵהוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל "Israel" saw, in *Exodus* 14:31, refers personally to the Patriarch Israel.

Tosafos derives the Rabbinic concept that Jacob did not die from the fact that any direct reference to 'death' is missing from the Biblical narrative in these verses.

Interestingly, the Sages in *Sotah* 13b where the episode of Esau's interference with Jacob's burial is related [see footnote to 50:13], apparently understand that Jacob lived on even in the *literal*, physical sense. The Talmud there records that when Chushim son of Dan angrily struck Esau on the head with a club, causing his eyes to fall out and roll to Jacob's feet. 'Jacob opened his eyes and laughed.'

However, most later commentators, perceive a purely spiritual connotation in the statement that Jacob did not die to imply that he lives on spiritually through the heritage he passed on to his descendants — the Children of Israel.

Concluding his commentary to *Genesis* with an interpretation of this statement, *Ramban* notes the apparent incongruity in this context of the fact that Jacob had applied the term 'death' to himself, above in 48:21. *Ramban* postulates that Jacob did so either because he did not know he would live on or did not want to reveal it. That his sons 'saw' that their father was dead [50:15] indicates that to them he was dead, or, as R' *Bachya* explains, that

ויוח נ על-פני אביו ויבך עליו וישק-לו: ויצו יוסף את-עבדיו את-הרפאים לחנט נ/ב

Jacob did not experience the *taste* of death.

Furthermore, *R' Bachya*, in elaborating upon *Ramban*, interprets the statement 'Jacob did not die' to mean that Jacob's soul always remained hovering over his body, whereas the souls of other righteous men who do not reach that degree of holiness return to their source and have no attachment to their bodies. But Jacob's soul ascended and descended, a power confined only to those who achieved the highest degree of holiness.¹¹

R' Nosson Scherman writes in the Overview to *Eichah* [p. xxxix]: "'Our father Jacob did not die' (*Taanis* 5b) because he had so perfected his body that it was no contradiction whatever to his soul. 'Death' is a wrenching, painful concept only because — and to the extent that — it involves the removal of the soul from a material existence it has

come to crave. The more materially lustful a person is, the less he can bear to part from this life for the holier one awailing him. And the more spiritual his life on earth has become, the less he cares to be encumbered by his body with its demands and animal instincts. Jacob had perfected himself to the point where leaving earthly life meant no more to him than removing a coat means to us. His soul simply discarded its earthly raiment — his body — and continued essentially unchanged. 'Death' in the deeper sense simply did not exist for Jacob — hence he did not 'die'." (*Resisei Layalah*).

Jacob was 147 years old when he passed on. [He was 130 when he presented himself to Pharaoh upon his arrival to Egypt, and he lived 17 years beyond that.] He died in the year 2255 from Creation (*Seder Olam*).

L

1. Jacob is embalmed and mourned.

וַיָּפֶל יוֹסֵף עַל-פְּנֵי אָבִיו — Then Joseph fell upon his father's face.

He threw himself on his father's face and wept unrestrainedly. When he could weep no more, he gave him a parting kiss (*R' Hirsch*).

This does not imply that the other children of Jacob did not do as

much. Joseph is mentioned specifically because his presence at Jacob's final moment was in fulfillment of God's promise to Jacob [46:4], *Joseph will place his hand over your eyes* (*Sechel Tov*). The Torah does not have to mention that Joseph placed his hand over his father's eyes; it is self-understood (*Ralbag*).

Haamek Davar suggests that

1. It is recorded (*Kesubos* 108b) that after his death Rabbeinu HaKodesh ['our Holy Rabbi' — *R' Judah* the Prince, compiler of the Mishnah] would return home every Sabbath evening to recite the *Kiddush*. Rabbeinu HaKodesh eventually stopped the practice lest it reflect on earlier righteous men who did not enjoy this privilege. [See also story of *R' Achai* in *Shabbos* 152b.]

R' Bachya writes that Jacob would certainly have had this power since he possessed holiness from three sources: From Abraham, who was sanctified with the command to circumcise himself before begetting Isaac; from Isaac, who was sanctified as a sacrifice without blemish; and his own, for he was the third of the Patriarchs and completed the Divine Chariot [the Patriarchs are mystically regarded as the Chariot that bears God's Presence — see *comm.* to 17:22]. Moreover, unlike the other Patriarchs, Jacob had no wicked children. That is why the Almighty is called 'The Holy One of Jacob' (*Isaiah* 29:23), but never the Holy One of Abraham or of Isaac.

50 ¹ Then Joseph fell upon his father's face. He wept
1-2 over him and kissed him. ² Joseph ordered his
servants, the physicians, to embalm his father; so the

Joseph is mentioned because he was nearest to Jacob at the last moment of his life, listening to his final whispered instructions in which Jacob presumably revealed to him certain Divine secrets not known to his brothers. It was because Joseph was privy to such prophetic information while Jacob experienced a final surge of the Divine Presence that Joseph could allude to signs of redemption when he later addressed his brothers [v. 25].

וַיִּבֶךְ עָלָיו וַיִּשָּׁקֵלּוּ — He wept over him and [he] kissed him.

It was a farewell kiss; the kiss at death (*Midrash HaGadol*).

While some *Midrashim* note that from this verse it is implicit that one is permitted to kiss the dead before burial, the *halachah* nowadays frowns upon the practice since a corpse imparts defilement that can adversely affect the soul of one who kisses it. The commentators maintain further that no permissive ruling may be derived from Joseph's example since the Patriarch's body was wholly sacred and did not become ritually defiled by death, in the sense that we learned above [49:33]: 'Jacob our father did not die.' [See *Pischei Teshuvah* to *Yoreh Deah* #394 who is permissive regarding parents, and the Testament of R' Yehudah HaChassid #4 in *Sefer Chassidim* Mossad Harav Kook ed., and notes thereon by R' Reuven Margulioth.]

2. וַיִּצְוֵה יוֹסֵף ... לְחַנֹּט אֶת אָבִיו — [And] Joseph ordered his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father.

Embalming involves the use of a

mixture of aromatic spices (*Rashi*).

Embalming was an Egyptian custom. It was believed that the soul would eventually return to its body after death and pains were therefore taken to preserve the body from dissolution in the grave. Numerous mummies have been found in a state of preservation that testifies to the skill of the ancient embalmers. Jewish law, however, forbids embalming; it mandates an unimpeded physical return to the elements by burial in the earth so that the body will decompose naturally. The soul rises to God; but the physical shelter, the chemical elements that clothed the soul, sink into the vast reservoir of nature. God's words to Adam were, *For you are dust, and unto dust you shall return* [3:10].

Malbim explains why Jewish law requires burial of a sort that will not delay the natural decomposition of the body. A living person has a higher, Godly soul (נֶשְׁמַת הָאֱלֹהִים) that cannot be degraded by sin and that leaves the body when death takes place. But there is also a lower spirit (רוּחַ) in a living person. A man has the obligation to serve God in such a manner that he elevates even this lower spirit until it is completely holy. If he does so, the spirit leaves the dead body together with the soul, for both are uncontaminated by man's animal nature. But to the extent that man sins he utilizes this life-giving spirit to feed the desires of his body, that it remains with it even in the grave. Only as the body decomposes does the spirit become free to return to its heavenly home. Embalming, therefore, is a disservice to the deceased because by preserving the body it entraps the spirit. In Jacob's case, however, his life was so righteous and holy that his spirit had been totally freed of any bodily attachment. This being the case, embalming served the positive purpose of preserving the body that had been a host, during his lifetime, to so much sanctity.

As gleaned from the commentators, the embalming was limited to royalty and consisted of: a) anointing and washing the body with mixtures of aromatic spices and oils to keep the

וַיִּחַי
נ/ג
אֶת־אָבִיו וַיַּחַנְטוּ הָרָפָאִים אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל:
ג וַיִּמְלְאוּ־לוֹ אֲרָבָעִים יוֹם כִּי כָן יִמְלֹא וַיִּמִּי
הַחֲנָטִים וַיִּבְכוּ אֹתוֹ מִצָּרִים שְׁבָעִים יוֹם:

body fragrant and delay putrefaction [comp. the case of Assa in *II Chronicles* 16:14]. The internal organs were infused with the fluids via the navel. The solution was changed daily and the body massaged daily for forty days, as v. 3 records. Eventually the body would become dehydrated and rigid and no repugnant odor would remain; b) the removal by chemical means of the putrefying elements so as to inhibit decomposition. Physicians performed this process because it required knowledge of anatomy and of the drugs necessary for the preservation of bodies (see *Abarbanel*; *R' Shmuel b. Chofni*; *Zohar*; *Michlol Yofi*).

Joseph's purpose in embalming Jacob.

It appears that Joseph's intention had nothing to do with the pagan religious significance attached to the rite by the Egyptians, viz. to preserve the body after death and keep it ready for reoccupation by the soul. Joseph's purpose was only to respectfully preserve his father's body from putrefaction during the long journey to the Sepulchre at Machpelah. [See footnote.]¹¹

Or HaChaim maintains to the contrary. Since the body of as righteous a person as Jacob never putrefies [as noted in the footnote below], Joseph purposely ordered Jacob embalmed lest the Egyptians venerate him as a god when they realized that his body did not decompose. [See the third interpretation offered by *Rashi* 47:29 s.v. אָל־נָא.]

וַיַּחַנְטוּ הָרָפָאִים אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל — *So the physicians embalmed Israel.*

As noted below [see inference in *Rashi* to v. 13], Jacob had left instructions that his corpse not be attended by any but his sons. That Joseph commanded the court physicians to embalm his father does not contradict this. The embalming process was done only by Jacob's sons; the physicians merely supervised and instructed them on the embalming procedure, but did not touch his body themselves (*R' Bachya*; *R' Shmuel b. Chofni*; *Sefer Chassidim* ed. Mekitzei Nirdamim 81563).

[The act is attributed to the physicians because they, as experts,

1. The Rabbis in the Midrash debate the propriety of Joseph's order that his father be embalmed.

R' Yehudah HaNassi and the Sages disagree. The former maintains that Joseph erred, and the Holy One rebuked him for taking such measures to artificially protect his father, saying, 'Could I not have protected My righteous? Did I not assure him not to fear the worm?' [see *Isaiah* 41:14]. In punishment for this Joseph died in his brothers' lifetime. [Joseph was next to the youngest brother; that he died before all his older brothers is because he did not display proper filial honor. Just as the reward for honoring parents is a long life, the converse is also true (see *Exodus* 20:12).]

According to the Sages, however, Joseph acted properly since Jacob himself asked that he be embalmed, as is apparent from what the Torah informs us in v. 12 below: *His sons did for him as he had instructed them* [which implies that even in embalming him Joseph was merely following instructions]. The Sages accordingly attribute Joseph's early death not to this, but to the fact that he listened without protest when Jacob was slighted five times by Judah who said, *your servant, my father*, five times. [This was not considered a sin on Judah's part, because he thought he was speaking to an Egyptian viceroy before whom such an expression was proper.]

[Cf. also *Berachos* 55a where the opinion is recorded that Joseph died prematurely because he assumed airs of authority (or because "public responsibility shortens the life"); see also

50 physicians embalmed Israel.

3-4 ³ Its forty-day term was completed, for such is the term of the embalmed; and Egypt bewailed him for seventy days. ⁴ When his bewailing period passed,

were responsible to oversee its proper execution. Sometimes the Torah attributes a deed to the one who performed it, and sometimes to the one who ordered or supervised it. See discussion in 37:28 "Who sold Joseph?"

The spiritual name *Israel* is used here to imply that all this honor was bestowed upon Jacob not only because of Joseph's royal status and in compliance with his command, but because he was *Israel* [denoting שְׂרָרָה, authority; dominion (see comm. to 35:29) and hence himself worthy of royal treatment (*Sforno*).

— The physicians embalmed "Israel" — i.e., in accordance with his status (*R' Hirsch*).

3. — וַיִּמְלְאוּ אֹרְבָעִים יוֹם — [And] its forty-day term was completed [lit. and forty days were filled for him].

They were involved in the embalming day after day until forty days were completed for it (*Rashi*).

כי בן ימלאו ימי הָעֲבָטִים — For such is the term of the embalmed [lit. for such are filled the days of those embalmed].

This is the period of time required for the spices and chemicals to be absorbed into the body to achieve their purpose of retarding decomposition (*Sechel Tov*; *Alshich*).

וַיִּכְבֹּד אֹתוֹ מִצְרַיִם שְׁבָעִים יוֹם — And Egypt bewailed him for seventy days.

[Not in addition to the aforementioned forty days, but inclusive of them:] These seventy days consisted of the forty for embalming plus [an additional] thirty for weeping. [The Egyptians bewailed Jacob so intensely and long] because they had been blessed on his account: with his arrival the famine had ceased [see on 47:19], and the Nile was blessed (*Rashi*).

— All of Egypt bewailed him. Jacob's descendants are not specifically mentioned as having also bewailed him as it is self-evident that they did. Although the Jewish period of mourning is seven days [see v. 15], Joseph mourned for the full seventy days, in com-

footnote on p. 1881, and comm. to v. 21 below where the opinion is recorded that Joseph died prematurely because he presumptuously told his brothers that he would sustain them rather than attributing their sustenance to God. See also *Targum Yonasan* to 46:29 s.v. וַיָּאָר that Joseph's life was shortened because he permitted Jacob to prostrate himself before him when they first met upon Jacob's arrival from Canaan.]

[Jacob's reason for requesting embalming (and Joseph's own rationalization for it, according to the first opinion in the Midrash) would have been simply to avoid putrefaction of the body because it was known that burial would have to be delayed a considerable amount of time due to: a) the unusually long national mourning period the Egyptians would observe for him; b) the long journey back to Canaan. Furthermore, in *Sanhedrin* 47b the purpose of burial is discussed, and the view is recorded that the decomposition of the body in the ground is a means of atonement for the sins that the dead committed in his lifetime, a reason that did not apply to Jacob (see comm. to *Ramban* 23:8 where a similar thought is expressed regarding Sarah's burial). In the case of the wholly righteous Patriarch, coupled with these overriding considerations, it was thought that embalming was appropriate. However, the first Sage in the Midrash disagreed, maintaining that embalming implied a certain lack of trust.]

ויחי
ג/ר
וַיַּעֲבְרוּ יְמֵי בְּכִיתוֹ יוֹסֵף אֶל-בֵּית
פְּרָעָה לֵאמֹר אִם-נָא מִצָּאתִי חַן
בְּעֵינֵיכֶם דַּבְּרוּ-נָא בְּאָזְנֵי פְרָעָה לֵאמֹר:

pliance with this national mourning period (R' Shmuel b. Chofni).¹¹

Several Midrashim [see *Torah She-leimah*] perceive in the number seventy an allusion to the seventy souls who descended with Jacob to Egypt, each of whom had by now grown into a household and each of whom bewailed him a different day.

4. וַיַּעֲבְרוּ יְמֵי בְּכִיתוֹ — *When his bewailing period [lit. days] passed.*

Concerning the death of Moses the Torah uses the expression: *the days of bewailing were ended* [וַיִּתְּמוּ] (*Deut. 34:8*), implying finality, while our verse says that the bewailing *passed*, [וַיַּעֲבְרוּ], implying a gradual process. This difference in wording is explained by the fact that Moses died on the threshold of the Promised Land. Then the Jews were living with the joyful prospect of the imminent occupation of their own land. Consequently after the prescribed period of thirty days, the mourning ended. Jacob's passing, though, was felt as a more far-reaching calamity. The last representative of the glorious Patriarchal epoch was gone. His descendants felt deprived of their

protector, and they knew that their position as aliens in Egypt would become more precarious. This is why "the bewailing days" *passed* without ever being formally *ended* as in Moses' case (R' Munk from the *Midrash*).

וַיַּעֲבְרוּ יוֹסֵף אֶל בֵּית פְּרָעָה — *Joseph spoke to Pharaoh's household.*

Not to Pharaoh himself, but to members of the royal court, asking them to deliver the following message to Pharaoh and intercede on his behalf (*Ralbag*).

According to the Midrash, Joseph feared that the courtiers might oppose his request to Pharaoh. So he acted according to the proverb: 'Win the accuser over to your cause if you want him not to act against you.' Joseph was obliged to speak first with the lady-in-waiting to the queen: she influenced her mistress, who in her turn persuaded Pharaoh on Joseph's behalf.

¶ Why did the all-powerful viceroy of Egypt require the members of the royal household to intercede with Pharaoh, rather than entering the king's presence himself? Why

11. Under normal circumstances, the Talmud makes it clear, excessive weeping for the dead is forbidden 'lest we appear to be more merciful than God Himself' [see *Moed Kattan* 27b]. A. Greenbaum in his notes to the above comment of R' Shmuel b. Chofni [Mossad HaRav Kook ed. Jerusalem 1979 #313] cites the case of R' Yehudah HaNassi in *Kesubos* 103b for whom the Sages considered instituting twelve months of mourning; cf. also *Rambam, Avel* 13:10. By quoting other sources as well, he defends R' Shmuel's view that in the case of the Patriarch, Joseph was permitted to extend his personal mourning period to coincide with that of the rest of the country.

There is also the view in *Midrash HaChefetz* that the mourning period extended until Jacob was buried.

See R' Bachya, however, who derives from our verse that it is not permitted to mourn for even a great personage in Israel longer than thirty days [since the thirty-day mourning period did not *begin* until the embalming procedure ended]. Cf. the case of Moses for whom the Israelites ended their mourning after thirty days [see comm. to *Deut. 34:8*].

Joseph spoke to Pharaoh's household saying, "If you please — if I have found favor in your eyes, speak now in the ears of Pharaoh as follows. ⁵ My father

did he require Pharaoh's permission in the first place?

— He was a mourner wearing rent clothing and sackcloth, and a mourner was not permitted to enter the royal palace, for *one may not enter the king's gate wearing sackcloth* [see *Esther* 4:2] (*Moshav Zekeinim*; *Midrash*; *Sforno*).

— Etiquette demanded that when even the highest official wished to make a personal request of the king, that he do so through one of the king's officers (*R' Avraham ben HaRambam*).

That Joseph needed permission at all to leave the land is quite understandable. Firstly, Joseph was the sole ruler and administrator of the land [see 41:44], and his absence — even temporarily — would cause a strain on the government. Furthermore, Pharaoh might have been apprehensive that Joseph would want to remain in Canaan; therefore, Joseph had to convince him to the contrary (*Chizkuni*). [See *Ramban* to 49:29.]

According to *Or HaAfeilah* [*Torah Sheleimah* #15], when Pharaoh had entrusted the kingdom to Joseph he extracted an oath that Joseph would never leave Egypt without his permission. Joseph now demonstrated his allegiance to that oath by seeking permission.

Minchah Belulah notes that Joseph might have needed royal permission because the journey would require horses and chariots; and these [as noted in 45:19, 27] were not allowed out of the country without Pharaoh's personal permission.

According to many commentators this need for permission demonstrated that certain forms of the Egyptian bondage had begun to take effect although it would not become official policy until after the last of the brothers was dead. Already with Jacob's death Joseph's prominence was somewhat diminished.

In his *Notes to Me'am Loez/Torah Anthology* (chapt. 11, note 28 (p. 665)) the translator, R' Aryeh Kaplan, offers that "Jacob's death in 2255 [1506 B.C.E.] came two years after the beginning of the reign of Thutmose II, who ruled from 1508 to 1490 B.C.E. Thutmose II was the son of Thutmose I, and is generally considered to have been a weak ruler. Some say that his father was still alive during his reign, and ruled jointly with him. Apparently, seeing the death of Jacob, whom he considered a miracle man, Thutmose was emboldened to diminish Joseph's authority."

אִם-נָא מָצְאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ דְּבָרֶיךָ — *If you please — if I have found favor in your eyes, speak now in the ears of Pharaoh as follows.*

The word נָא is used in Scripture both for *please* and for *now*. In our verse, it combines both connotations: the only way they could do him a favor was by expediting his request without delay, because he was afraid to postpone fulfillment of his oath to Jacob (*Or HaChaim*).

As a statesman, Joseph used אִם-נָא, *if you please*, the courteous form required by protocol, even though he knew that Pharaoh's courtiers would not dare refuse him, and would be pleased to perform a service for the viceroy of the land (*R' Hirsch*).

[The idiom of *speaking in the ears* denoting *personally* occurs in 44:18. See also 23:10.]

ה אָבִי הַשְׁבִּיעֵנִי לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מֵת
בְּקִבְרִי אֲשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן שָׁמָּה
תִּקְבְּרֵנִי וְעִתָּהּ אֶעֱלֶה-נָּא וְאֶקְבְּרָה אֶת-
ו אָבִי וְאֶשׁוּבָה: וַיֹּאמֶר פֶּרַעַה עֲלֶה וְקַבֵּר
ו אֶת-אָבִיךָ בְּאֶשֶׁר הַשְׁבִּיעְךָ: וַיַּעַל יוֹסֵף
לִקְבֹר אֶת-אָבִיו וַיַּעֲלוּ אֹתוֹ כָּל-עַבְדֵי

5. אָבִי הַשְׁבִּיעֵנִי לֵאמֹר — *My father had adjured me* [bound me by an oath], saying.

Joseph was careful to stress that his father had insisted on an oath. This emphasized that in addition to filial duty, an oath was involved, which he was bound under every circumstance to fulfill. Joseph knew that this latter detail would be the determining factor in Pharaoh's grant of permission. See v. 6 (*Abarbanel*; *Malbim*; *Akeidah*).

מֵת — Behold, I am about to die. [See 48:21.]

— Jacob wanted to give his request the greater power of a deathbed charge (*Malbim*).

בְּקִבְרִי אֲשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן שָׁמָּה
תִּקְבְּרֵנִי — *In my grave, which I have hewn for myself in the land of Canaan — there you are to bury me.*

This does not quite parallel the reason Jacob himself gave in 47:30 where his emphasis was on being buried with his ancestors. Joseph may have thought that Pharaoh would be more impressed by Jacob's desire to be buried in a duly-acquired grave than by his desire to be buried with his ancestors (*R' Munk*).

Rashi interprets that in its most literal sense the verb כָּרִיתִי [*hewn*] means *dug*, as in *Exodus* 21:33 *כִּי יִכְרֶה אִישׁ*, if a man shall dig. He continues that in the Midrash there is an interpretation which fits the

contextual meaning of the word — viz. אֲשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי means *which I have bought*. In coastal cities they use the term *בִּירָה* to signify *purchase*. [*Midrash*; see also *Sotah* 13a; *Chullin* 92a. See also *Rashi* to *Deut.* 2:6 s.v. תִּקְבְּרֵנִי].

Rashi cites another Midrashic interpretation that כָּרִיתִי is a verbal form of *כָּרַה*, *heap*, denoting that Jacob had *heaped up* all the silver and gold which he had brought from the house of Laban and said to Esau, 'Take this for your share in the Cave.' (See *Rashi* to 46:6.) [Following the latter, the passage would be rendered: *In my grave for which I made a heap* — i.e., which I acquired from Esau by heaping up my possessions.]

[All the above interpretations emphasize how Joseph was trying to impress Pharaoh with the fact that Jacob's stake in the Cave of Machpelah was not merely an emotional one: Jacob had actually carved out the grave himself, or bought it, or acquired it by heaping up a vast fortune for it.]

Ramban [who interprets the word as *dug*] writes in his comm. to 49:31 that Jacob emphasized that he had already dug his grave in order to emphasize that he had taken personal possession of it. He said this with reference to his fear that Esau — or his children — might lay claim to the gravesite in the ancestral Cave of Machpelah. Jacob longed to

50 had adjured me, saying, 'Behold, I am about to die. In
6-7 my grave, which I have hewn for myself in the land
of Canaan — there you are to bury me. 'Now, I will
go up if you please, and bury my father; then I will
return.'⁶ And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your
father as he adjured you."

⁷ So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with

be united in burial with his sacred ancestors. If Esau was buried there, Jacob could not be buried there for one burial place does not serve two families. As noted in *Mechilta*, no one would be permitted to be buried there except the three Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Therefore Jacob was determined to establish his claim to the site during his lifetime by digging a grave for himself ... thereby indicating that with him terminated the group of people who was to be buried there.

Onkelos — followed by many commentators — renders the phrase *אשר אשר לי*, which I 'prepared' for myself. [*Nefesh HaGer* notes that the expression 'prepare a grave' is used by *Onkelos*' teacher, R' Eliezer, in *Taanis* 25b.]

ועתה אעלה נא ואקברה את אבי ואשובה
— Now, I will go up, if you please, and [I will] bury my father; then I will return.

It is only now that I wish to go there, and only for the express purpose of burying my father and returning immediately thereafter. You need not be concerned that I will want to remain there (*Abarbanel*; *Malbim*).

Now — in fulfillment of my personal obligation under the terms of the oath — I will go up, etc. (*Haamek Davar*).

The word *ואקברה* is synonymous with *ואקבר*. The addition of the suffix *ה* is courteous form of expression and denotes

humility by the speaker [comp. *וְאֶקְבֵּלָהּ* in 27:19] (*Sechel Tov*).

6. *וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה* — And Pharaoh said.

I.e., to the courtiers who acted on Joseph's behalf and relayed his request to Pharaoh. Pharaoh spoke to them in second person as if to imply: "Tell Joseph: 'Go up and bury your father,' " etc. (*Sechel Tov*).

וְכַאֲשֶׁר הִשְׁבִּיעָךְ — As he adjured you.

'Were it not for that oath I would not permit you to go.' Pharaoh did not dare to tell Joseph to violate the oath, for he was afraid Joseph might answer him, 'If that is your attitude, I have the right to violate the oath I once made to you. I once swore not to divulge that [although the king of Egypt is required to know all the existing languages] you do not possess a knowledge of the Hebrew language while I do.' [Accordingly I am more fit to be king than you (*Gur Aryeh*)] (*Rashi* citing *Sotah* 36b). [The entire incident *Rashi* is referring to is recorded in the footnote to 41:38 (p. 1791-2).]

7. The burial procession.

וַיַּעַל יוֹסֵף לִקְבֹּר אֶת־אָבִיו — So Joseph went up to bury his father.

Joseph is specifically mentioned here to allude to the fact that though he was the greatest man of his time, he still personally attended to his father's burial. In reward for this — measure for measure —

ויחי ונח"י
 פָּרַעַה זָקְנֵי בֵיתוֹ וְכָל זָקְנֵי אֶרֶץ-מִצְרַיִם:
 ה וְכָל בֵּית יוֹסֵף וְאֶחָיו וּבֵית אָבִיו רַק טַפָּם
 ט וְצִאֲנָם וּבִקְרָם עֲזָבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן: וַיַּעַל
 עִמּוֹ גַּם-רֶכֶב גַּם-פָּרָשִׁים וַיְהִי הַמַּחֲנֶה
 י בְּכַד מֶאֶד: וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד-גֶּרֶן הָאֹטָר אֲשֶׁר

Moses, the greatest of all, personally attended to Joseph's remains (Sotah 9b).

— וַיַּעַל אִתּוֹ כָּל-עַבְדֵי פָּרַעַה זָקְנֵי בֵיתוֹ
 And with him went up all of Pharaoh's servants, the elders of his household.

According to some commentators, these dignitaries accompanied Joseph of their own accord in a display of honor to Joseph and to show their respect for Jacob who was acknowledged as great and wise even by the wise men of his time and the one in whose merit the famine had ended prematurely (cf. Sforno).

Abarbanel maintains, however, that Pharaoh sent this group of Egyptians to accompany the burial party because he feared that Joseph and his brothers might be influenced to remain in Canaan by Jacob's attachment to the land:

The expression *all Pharaoh's servants* refers to ordinary Egyptians, as everyone in Egypt, except Joseph, was termed *Pharaoh's servant* [i.e. subject] (Ibn Ezra).

As noted in the *comm.* to 23:3, עִמּוֹ, with him, denotes equality, while the synonym אִתּוֹ denotes accompaniment by one of *secondary stature*. Here the latter term is used to denote that those who accompanied Joseph were of lower status and Joseph remained aloof from them throughout the journey since he was in grief (Haamek Davar).

— וְכָל זָקְנֵי אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
 And all the elders of the land of Egypt.

Elders denotes *wise men*. They paid Jacob this honor because he was regarded as a wise man by the wise of that generation (Sforno).

8. רַק טַפָּם וְצִאֲנָם וּבִקְרָם עֲזָבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן
 — Only their little ones, [and] their sheep, and their cattle did they leave in the land of Goshen.

Since Joseph intended to return, there was no need to take along the children and cattle. However, many commentators follow the view that with Jacob's death subtle aspects of the Egyptian bondage began, although they did not take on serious proportions until Joseph and that entire generation died. These commentators maintain that the brothers wanted to take along everyone — including their children and belongings — but Pharaoh would not permit it. Because of this, Joseph found it unnecessary to reassure his brothers [v. 24 below] that God would surely remember them and bring them out of Egypt, for they were not permitted to leave of their own accord (Malbim).

In any event, this leaving behind of the children and cattle may have formed a precedent. When Moses asked Pharaoh to permit the Jews to leave for three days to worship God, Pharaoh insisted that only the men go, and the children and others remain in Egypt [see Exodus 10:11] (R' Sheah Brander).

9. — וַיַּעַל עִמּוֹ גַּם-רֶכֶב גַּם-פָּרָשִׁים
 And he brought up with him both chariots and horsemen [lit. also chariot(s) also horsemen].

50 him went up all of Pharaoh's servants, the elders of
 8-10 his household, all the elders of the land of Egypt,
 8 and all of Jacob's household — his brothers, and his
 father's household; only their little ones, their sheep,
 and their cattle did they leave in the land of Goshen.
 9 And he brought up with him both chariots and
 horsemen; and the camp was very imposing.
 10 They came to Goren HaAtad, which is across the

That horsemen accompanied him was a tribute to Jacob whom the military chiefs regarded as a great warrior (*Sforno*).

The translation of *וַיַּעַל עִמּוֹ* as a transitive verb: *brought up with him*, rather than intransitive: *there went up with him*, follows *Rashbam*.

This is based on the singular *וַיַּעַל* (*Haamek Davar*).

According to the Midrash, these were not part of the mourning cortege, but were for battle [in the event Esau would dispute their right to bury Jacob in the Cave of Machpelah].

Ramban [com. 49:31], too, interprets that Joseph had these chariots and horsemen accompany him since he knew the presumptuousness of Esau and his sons, and he feared an attack. And his fear was justified. An encounter between Esau and Jacob's sons indeed occurred. See footnote to v. 13.

Following *Haamek Davar's* distinction between *עִמּוֹ* and *אִתּוֹ* in v. 7, the use of *עִמּוֹ* here suggests a certain equality, since Joseph, too, shared with them their responsibility in overseeing the safety of the cortege. [But cf. *HaKsav V'HaKabbalah*.]

It is common for Scripture to repeat the adverb *גַּם*, also, to idiomatically denote 'this as well as that' as in 24:25: *גַּם אֶנְחֵנוּ גַּם 47:3: גַּם תִּכְּבֹּד גַּם מִסְפּוֹא גַּם אֶנְחֵנוּ גַּם אֶדְרָתֵנוּ 47:19: אֶבְרֵיתִי*.

Nevertheless, the word *גַּם* usually denotes a *ריבוי*, an implied extension beyond what is specifically mentioned in the text. In this case it alludes to *armed warriors* who accompanied them to provide additional protection in case the circumstances would demand it. Moreover, angels also guarded him [see below] (*R' Bachya*).

וַיְהִי הַמַּחֲנֶה כְּבֵד מְאֹד — And the camp was very imposing.

Besides the literal meaning, this might also allude to a *celestial camp* [of angels] who came to guard Jacob in death as they had in life. Perhaps this camp was composed of that same camp of angels who encountered him when he was *en-route* to Laban and whom on his return journey he had later referred to as a *Godly camp* [32:3]. (They had also been sent from on high at that time to protect Jacob from Esau.) Kabbalistically there is an esoteric allusion in the words *כְּבֵד מְאֹד* to the Sacred Names of God (*R' Bachya*; see *HaEzrach b'Yisrael* cited by *R' Chavel*).

10. וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד-גֹּרֵן הָאֵטָד. — [And] they came to Goren HaAtad.

[The exact site is unknown.]

The Hebrew name means: the field [or: threshing floor] of thorns. *Rashi* explains that in the most literal sense, the site was so named because it was surrounded by

thorns [and from afar it appeared like a field of thorns].

Rashi proceeds to cite the Talmudic tradition of how this previously obscure place came to be so designated when so many other fields and threshing floors are surrounded by thorns: The Rabbis in *Sotah* 13a record that the sons of Esau, of Ishmael, and of Keturah [this is the version in the *Gemara*; *Rashi* in *Chumash* reads: all the kings of Canaan and the princes of Ishmael] came to wage war against them [i.e., against the sons of Jacob and prevent his burial]. But when they saw Joseph's crown hanging upon Jacob's coffin, they all took their crowns as well and hung them on his coffin. Thus, at that place they wreathed his coffin with their own crowns [which, by comparison to Joseph's crown, were nothing more than 'thorns']. The scene figuratively resembled a 'field surrounded by thorns' [and the Torah commemorated that event by giving the place a name alluding to that incident].

[The *Gemara* concludes that there were thirty-six crowns in all, which *Rashi* there enumerates as belonging to twelve princes of Ishmael; twenty-three chiefs of Esau ... plus the one crown of Joseph (see *Mizrachi* to 36:5)].

[Homiletically, the figurative comparison of the heathen crowns to thorns intimates that even the goodness wrought by the wicked is but a 'thorn' to the truly righteous (see *Rashi* to 31:24 and 41:10)].

[The Talmud records that notwithstanding this tribute by the chiefs of Esau at Goren HaAtad, there were hostilities at Machpelah as Esau tried to

prevent Jacob's burial in the cave. See footnote to v. 13.]

וְאֵשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן — Which is across the Jordan.

This phrase is somewhat confusing. The term *across the Jordan* in relation to Canaan usually refers to the territory on the east bank of the Jordan [i.e., the twentieth century country of Jordan]. It is difficult to assume that this is its meaning here since it leaves unexplained why the cortege was so far from the normal route from Egypt to Hebron; for them to travel via Jordan would have lengthened the trip considerably [see map next page].

Chizkuni maintains that the passage refers to the west bank of the Jordan, in Canaan proper. [*Rashbam* refers to such an interpretation of the term in *Deut.* 1:1 where he explains that from the vantage point of the desert, the land of Canaan is the 'other [i.e. western] side' of the Jordan. See also *ibid.* 11:30].

In his *comm.* to v. 11 below, *Chizkuni* writes that all the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw ... which is across the Jordan — i.e., the inhabitants of the east bank saw what was happening across the river in Canaan. The inhabitants of Sichon and Og, who lived to the east of the Jordan and were considered Canaanites [see *Numbers* 21:22ff; see *Rashi* to *Deut.* 18:2] saw the mourning in Goren HaAtad in Canaan proper, which they — from their territory — referred to as 'across the Jordan.' Similarly, in *Numbers* 32:19 [where Reuben and Gad are speaking to Moses from the east, the desert-side of the Jordan] they said: *For we will not inherit*

50 *Jordan, and there they held a very great and imposing*

with them [the other tribes] on the other side [i.e., Canaan] of the Jordan.

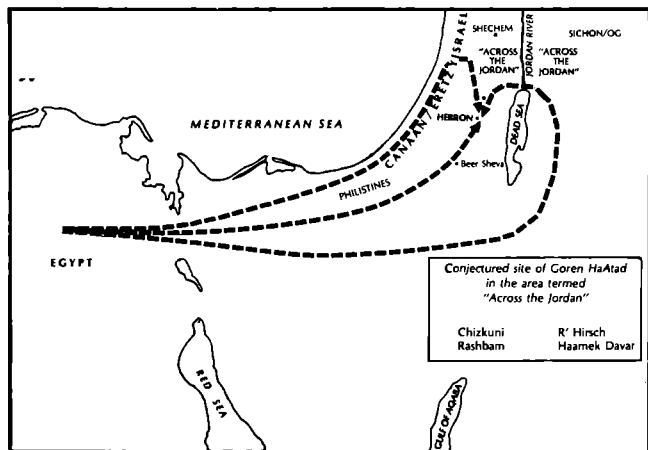
[Comp. also *Kaftor VaFerach* chapt. 48 who ascertains from *Rambam* and other sources that the Mishnaic reference to 'across the Jordan' in *Shevi'is* 9:2 refers to the west side of the Jordan. There the Mishnah speaks of three territories in *Eretz Yisrael* regarding the Sabbatical Year: Judah; across the Jordan; and Galilee." *Sechel Tov* appears to interpret similarly by stating: 'Goren HaAtad was located on the other side of the Jordan — i.e., between the Jordan River and Egypt,' i.e. in *Eretz Yisrael* proper].

What remains difficult, as *Shaarei Aharon* observes, is why the Torah here calls it *across the Jordan* instead of *Canaan* as it does elsewhere in Genesis. In v. 11, following *Chizkuni's* view cited above, the reference is quite correct since the description refers to the van-

tage point of *Sichon* and *Og* who lived on the east bank. However, in v. 10, which does not quote onlookers, the Torah should have stated: *And they came to Goren HaAtad in the land of Canaan*.

Shaarei Aharon postulates that by this designation the Torah alludes to Joseph's circuitous route. He maintains that the only part of *Eretz Yisrael* designated as 'across the Jordan' is the territory north of Judah directly adjacent to the Jordan River. The territory of Judah — where Hebron and the Cave of Machpelah are situated — is not called 'across the Jordan' since it borders on the Dead Sea, not the Jordan River [see map]. This is further evidenced by the wording in the Mishnah *Shevi'is* cited above where Judah is distinct from 'across the Jordan.'

Now, had Joseph taken the direct route from Egypt to Hebron in Judah, he would have been south of the Jordan, and not in the territory called 'across the Jordan.' The fact that the Torah uses



Possible routes of the burial procession

ויחי נ/יא ויבך מאד ויעש לאביו אבל שבעת ימים: וירא יושב הארץ הכנעני את- האבל בגרן האטד ויאמרו אבל-כבד זה

this term is to indicate that Joseph took a longer roundabout route around the Dead Sea and approached Hebron from the north so that many peoples would join the funeral cortege and pay their final respects to the venerable Patriarch whose ancestors were renowned among the Canaanite nations as princes of God.

Haamek Davar interprets similarly and draws support from Mishnah *Kelim* 1:7 that it is customary to transport a corpse from place to place until the burial site is reached, in order to honor the deceased.

Cf. note to *Torah Sheleimah* that Joseph might have been forced to take a roundabout route to Hebron since some of the Canaanite inhabitants were hostile to Egypt and refused passage to the armed cortege. In fact, *R' Meyuchas* suggests that the cortege traversed the same desert route east of the Jordan that the Israelites would later take at the Exodus, and entered Canaan westward, across the Jordan. [As noted below, some Midrashim record that they took a roundabout route even on the return journey, passing through Shechem.] Goren HaAtad would then be literally located on the 'other,' i.e. eastern, side of the Jordan in relation to *Eretz Yisrael*.

R' Hirsch to v. 12 also maintains that they took the roundabout route via the Jordan for the sake of the Egyptians who wished to avoid the land of the Philistines, which they would have had to cross had they taken the direct route.

For, as *Akeidas Yitzchak* explains, the Egyptian sphere of influence included the territory east of the Jordan, but not Canaan proper or the land of the Philistines.

מאד ויבך נדרול מקסדושים — *And there they held a very great and imposing eulogy.*

נדרול, great, means that they spent

several hours eulogizing their profound loss; ויבך, and imposing [lit. heavy], means that they spoke words that penetrate the inner recesses of the heart (*Haamek Davar*).

— The eulogy was more imposing than any ever held before it (*Sechel Tov*).

According to the Talmud [*Sotah* 13a] even the horses and donkeys took part in the mourning [i.e., their owners draped garments of mourning on them (*Maharshal*)].

[The varied meanings of הקסדו, eulogy or lamentation, have been discussed in the comm. to 23:2 (p. 864).]

ויעש לאביו אבל שבעת ימים — *And he observed a seven-day mourning period for his father.*

According to *Ibn Ezra*, these seven days followed the burial as the Sages mandated [in *Moed Katan* 27a, that the seven-day mourning period begins after the grave is closed].

R' Bachya interprets, however, that this mourning took place before the interment and the sequence of the Scriptural narrative reflects the chronological order of events, whereas the laws of mourning which the Torah commanded us are to be observed after interment. In the Talmud, *Moed Katan* 20a, we find: 'From where is it derived that the mourning period is seven days? — From the verse [Amos 8:10]: *And I shall turn your feasts* (Passover and Succos) *into mourning*. Just as the "feasts" last seven days, so is the period for mourning also seven days.'^[1]

50 eulogy. And he observed a seven-day mourning
11 period for his father.¹¹ When the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning in Goren HaAtad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning for Egypt."

11. נִרְאָה יוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֶת
הָאֵלֶּל בְּגֹרֶן הָאֲטָד — When the Canaanite inhabitants of the land [lit. and the inhabitant of the land, the Canaanite (the singular has the collective sense)] saw the mourning in Goren HaAtad.

The Canaanite inhabitants of the land refers, according to Chizkuni cited in the previous verse, to Sichon and Og who lived in the Emorite territory east of the Jordan, and who are referred to as Canaanites [see Rashi to Deut. 18:2]. Others interpret conversely that the Canaanites referred to here lived west of the River — in Canaan proper — and the east bank is referred to as 'across the Jordan.'

[And] they said, 'This is a grievous [severe] mourning for Egypt.'

The Canaanites realized why the Egyptians were mourning even

more intensely now than they had previously. As the party neared Jacob's burial place and saw how even the Canaanite kings paid tribute to Jacob by putting their crowns on his coffin, the Egyptians felt the full impact of their great loss. Then they lamented that they could not have the privilege of burying Jacob in their own country, where his presence, even in death, would be a lasting source of merit for them. Therefore the Torah refers to it as a grievous mourning for Egypt since they perceived how greatly Jacob's absence would affect Egypt, for a righteous person's presence brings benefit, even after his death [see Sotah 36a].¹²

Furthermore, several commentators subscribe to the view that they were now leaving the periphery of the Egyptian sphere of influence. About to enter the foreign soil of Canaan, they sensed

1. Seven-day mourning period.

Tosafos *ibid.* s.v. הָאֵלֶּל writes that we cannot derive the seven-days of mourning from our passage — and he observed a seven day mourning period for his father [as the Yerushalmi Moed Katan 3:5 indeed attempts to do] — since our passage speaks of mourning before burial. Furthermore, as the Yerushalmi concludes, we cannot derive a law from a practice observed before the Torah was given. [See Torah Temimah].

In any event, we see that the custom of having a seven-day period of mourning dates back to the time of the Patriarchs [see Ramban to 29:27].

Ramban [Hilchos Avel 1:1] writes in this regard: According to Torah law, the mourning period is only on the first day — the day of death and of burial; the seven days, however, are not Scripturally mandated, although the Torah does mention: he observed a seven-day mourning period for his father. When the Torah was given, the law was established anew [and the Scriptural mandate was established as one day] while the Rabbis established the law at seven days based upon the exegetical interpretation of Amos 8:10 cited above. The halachah has so been codified, and a seven-day mourning period has been universally adopted.

[See note to Torah Sheleimah §33-34.]

2. R' Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch [Or HaTorah] perceives a prophetic connotation in the fact that Egypt is portrayed as the prime mourner in this event. Jacob's stay in Egypt resulted in the land being blessed with abundance, and this blessing would have resulted in both the spiritual and material elevation of Egypt for untold generations, and in the development of

ויחי
נ/יב-יג
למִצְרַיִם עַל-כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ אֶבֶל מִצְרַיִם
יב אֲשֶׁר בְּעֶבֶר הִיִּרְדָּן: וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בָנָיו לוֹ כֵּן
יג בְּאֲשֶׁר צָוָם: וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֹתוֹ בָּנָיו אֶרֶצָה

their loss even more profoundly (*Kesef Nivchar; Akeidah; Me'am Loez; Malbim*).

According to *Abarbanel*, the emphasis on *Egypt* might imply that the Canaanites were fearful that the great mourning augured evil for their land. They therefore said, 'This is a grievous mourning for Egypt,' that is, 'May any evil consequences befall *them*, not *us*!' and therefore they gave it this name.

עַל-כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ אֶבֶל מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר
בְּעֶבֶר הִיִּרְדָּן — *Therefore it was named* [lit. *he called its name*] *Avel Mitzraim* [lit. *the mourning of Egypt*] which is across the Jordan.

The local populace was so impressed by the unprecedented national mourning of the great Egyptian state that their ruler chose this place-name to memorialize a foreign nation's love and respect for a Jewish Patriarch (*R' Munk*).

[That *Jacob's* descendants bewailed *Jacob's* loss was only natural and would not inspire onlookers to name a place after it; it was the massive outpouring of grief by the *Egyptian* cortege that was so inspiring.]

The Torah mentions again that it was "across the Jordan" to identify it, for there were other places named

Avel. [Comp. *Avel haShittim* in *Numbers* 33:49 where Moses was mourned.] It also alludes to the roundabout route the cortege took in honor of Jacob as noted in the previous verse.

12. The burial.

— [And] וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בָנָיו לוֹ כֵּן בְּאֲשֶׁר צָוָם
his sons did for him as he had instructed them:

What they did is explained in the following verse (*Rashi*).

[*Rashi* thus accounts for the apparent superfluity of this passage by explaining that this verse introduces the next one. The import of the statement is that even the way the sons carried Jacob's bier, as recorded in the following verse, was in strict conformity with the instructions he had given before he died. (See footnote to 49:33).]

According to the Midrash cited in v. 1 this passage refers to Jacob's instruction that they embalm him.

R' Hirsch writes that the continuity of the verses suggests that the Egyptians accompanied them only to this point, but not further. From there on the children alone took the body and buried it in accordance with Jacob's wishes, while the rest of the retinue awaited their return and then accompanied them back to Egypt.

כֵּן has also the meaning of *sincerity*, as in *Proverbs* 11:19. Jacob's sons acted *sincerely*, that is to say, without trying to discover the reasons

Israel as well. Instead, after Jacob's burial, Egypt began to despise Israel and eventually enslaved them. The result was the utter destruction of Egypt through the plagues and Splitting of the Sea. Though the Egyptians themselves were unaware of this outcome of Jacob's death, in retrospect it was truly a grievous event for their nation.

... Thus as *Oznaim LaTorah* concludes, they prophesied and knew not what they prophesied. Jacob's death resulted in great mourning for *Egypt*, for with it the bondage began, and Israel had long before been promised (15:14): *But also upon the nation which they shall serve will I execute judgment* — the ten plagues and the drowning of Pharaoh's host in the Sea of Reeds.

50 Therefore it was named Avel Mitzraim, which is
12-13 across the Jordan.

12 His sons did for him as he had instructed them:

13 His sons carried him to the land of Canaan and

which had prompted their father to arrange them in the order mentioned below. They acted with sincerity, simply because he had commanded them.

13. וַיִּשָּׂאוּ אֹתוֹ בְּנוֹי אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן — His sons carried him to the land of Canaan.

I.e., from Avel Mitzraim onward they carried the casket on their shoulders (*Abarbanel*).

His sons, not his grandsons. For Jacob had commanded them: My bier should not be carried by an Egyptian or by one of your sons because they are children of Canaanite women; you yourselves shall carry it (*Rashi*).

This follows the opinion of R' Nechemiah in the Midrash [cited in the comm. to 37:35, 38:2, and 46:9] who maintains that Jacob's children married Canaanites [see *Ramban* to 38:2 who, drawing from *Pesachim* 50a, explains Canaanites in this context to refer to "foreign women, whose fathers were merchants passing through Canaan (the word כְּנָעִי sometimes means merchant, as in *Proverbs* 31:24), for it is illogical to assume that they all married women who were from the accursed, servile Canaanite nation."]

According to R' Yehudah in the Midrash, who maintains that twin sisters were born with each of Jacob's sons and the sons and daughters of different mothers married one another, it is not clear why Jacob did not permit his grandchildren from these marriages to carry his bier.

Possibly, as R' David Feinstein suggests, R' Yehudah draws a different exegetical inference from the phrase his 'sons' carried him, inferring not that it excluded grandchildren but that it alludes to the formation of his sons as they carried his bier. Their position formed the precedent for the tribes in the Wilderness, who stationed themselves around the Tabernacle just as the sons stood around Jacob's bier, as *Rashi* proceeds to record further in his comment.

[See *Chizkuni* who postulates that R' Yehudah would maintain that the half-sister wives of the sons died childless and then they

married Canaanites. It was the offspring of these marriages Jacob then forbade to carry his bier. Now, although the children of Simeon, whose 'Canaanite' wife is Midrashically identified as Dinah, should not have been disqualified along with the others, Jacob did not want to promote jealousy by permitting only part of his grandchildren to participate. Ephraim and Manasseh did accompany the bier, but this would not have caused jealousy since they were of royalty and had been raised to the level of full-fledged tribes.]

[The question of whether the twin sisters had died by the time Jacob went down to Egypt is the subject of controversy between *Rashi* and *Ramban*. See comm. to 46:26.]

Rashi continues: ... Jacob had also assigned his sons their positions: three on the east [i.e. front] side and three on each of the other three sides of the bier, establishing the precedent for the arrangement they would follow later in the desert when each tribe encamped under its own standard. [The Midrash depicts the order as follows: *East*: Judah, Issachar, Zebulun; *South*: Reuben, Simeon, Gad; *West*: Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin; *North*: Dan, Asher, Naftali.]

Dan/Asher/Naftali		
Benjamin	BIER	Judah
Manasseh		Issachar
Ephraim		Zebulun
Gad/Simeon/Reuben		

However, *Rashi* continues, the twelve tribes that formed these four divisions did not include Levi or Joseph. 'Levi shall not carry my bier,' Jacob had said, 'since his descendants are destined to carry the holy Ark [and it is therefore not proper for him to carry a bier containing human remains]. Joseph shall not carry it because he is a

וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אוֹתוֹ בַּמַּעֲרָת שָׂדֶה
 הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר קָנָה אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַשָּׂדֶה
 לְאַחֲזֹת־קֶבֶר מֵאֵת עֶפְרָן הַחֲתִי עַל־פְּנֵי
 יִמּוֹ מִמָּרָא: וַיָּשֶׁב יוֹסֵף מִצְרִימָה הוּא וְאָחִיו
 וְכָל־הָעָלִים אִתּוֹ לִקְבֹּר אֶת־אָבִיו אַחֲרֵי

ruler [and must be given respect].
 Manasseh and Ephraim shall take
 their places.' This is what the Torah
 refers to when it says [Numbers
 2:2]: *Every man shall encamp by
 his own banner according to the
 'signs' — meaning: according to the
 signs [i.e., symbolic precedent]
 which their father had given them
 individually for carrying his coffin*
 [see *Tanchuma* ad loc.].

— וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אוֹתוֹ בַּמַּעֲרָת שָׂדֶה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה
*And they buried him in the Cave of
 the Machpelah field.*^[1]

— Precisely following Jacob's de-
 tailed instructions (*Ralbag*) ...

— אֲשֶׁר קָנָה אַבְרָהָם ... עַל־פְּנֵי מִמָּרָא
*The field that Abraham had bought
 as a burial estate from Ephron the
 Hittite, facing Mamre.*

The reason the verse mentions

1. The War at the Burial.

Ramban cites Yosef HaKohen ben Gorion, the presumed author of the chronicles called *Yossifon* [ch. 2] 'and other books of ancient history' that Zepho the son of Eliphaz the son of Esau [see above 36:11] came and waged war with Jacob's children concerning the burial. But Joseph's might prevailed and Zepho and his army were vanquished and brought back to Egypt.

Zepho remained in prison for the rest of Joseph's life. After Joseph's death Zepho escaped and fled to Compagna in Italy. He became ruler of the Caetheans in Rome and eventually was crowned ruler of Italy. He was the first sovereign ruler of Rome and it was he who built the first and foremost palace there.

❖§ The death of Esau at the Cave of Machpelah.

The Talmud and several Midrashim record another incident at the burial which resulted in the death of Esau:

In *Sotah* 13a [already cited in the comm. to Naftali's blessing in 49:21] we learn that when Jacob's sons attempted to bury Jacob in the Machpelah Cave, Esau [who according to some Midrashim accompanied the cortege from Goren HaAtad where he had paid his respects to his brother along with the other Canaanite kings (v. 10)] protested. He claimed that of the two graves that had remained in the cave, Jacob used his share for Leah's burial, and the remaining grave was therefore Esau's.

When Jacob's sons countered that Jacob had purchased the rights to burial in the Cave from Esau, Esau protested that he had sold only Jacob the double share of the firstborn, but not his simple burial right as Isaac's son in the family sepulchre.

When the sons persisted that Esau had sold everything and retained no rights in the Cave, Esau demanded that they produce a document.

The brothers had left the document in Egypt. They pondered what to do and they decided to send Naftali since he could run swiftly as a deer.

As they waited for Naftali to return, among those present was Chushim son of Dan, who was deaf. When he understood the debate and that they were waiting for Naftali to return, he became angry and shouted: 'It is a disgrace! Is my grandfather

they buried him in the cave of the Machpelah field, the field that Abraham had bought as a burial estate from Ephron the Hittite, facing Mamre.

¹⁴ Joseph returned to Egypt — he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father — after he buried his father.

that this was the field that Abraham had bought as a burial estate is to allude to the fact that Abraham's intention was completely fulfilled with Jacob's burial since he bought the sepulchre for the three Patriarchs and Matriarchs, and no other person was to be buried there. This is the reason Joseph did not ask that he be buried in the cave with his father since, as noted in *Mechilta*, no one else may be buried there (*Ramban* to 49:30).

[On the phraseology and detailed

description of the site, see comm. to parallel passages in 23:17-19 and 49:30.]

וַיָּשָׁב יוֹסֵף ... וְאָחָיו וְכָל הָעָלִים. אָחָיו — Joseph returned to Egypt — he, [and] his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father — after he buried his father.

On the outward journey [v. 7] the Egyptians took precedence over the brothers and are mentioned first. But when they saw the honor

to lie there in contempt until Naftali returns from Egypt? With that he took a club and struck Esau on the head so hard that Esau's eyes fell out and rolled to Jacob's feet. Jacob [who according to the Talmud 'did not die'] opened his eyes and smiled. This is what the Psalmist alluded to in *Psalms* 58:11, *The righteous shall rejoice when he sees vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.* [See *Maharsha* who notes that this entire psalm speaks of Esau.]

This incident fulfilled Rebecca's unwitting prognostication when she said [27:45]: *Why should I be bereaved of both of you on the same day?* For though the death of the two of them did not occur on the same day [since at least seventy-seven days had already passed since Jacob's demise], still their burial took place on the same day.

According to *Tosafos* in *Gittin* 55b s.v. בַּיְחֻדָּה, there was a tradition that Judah killed Esau, as it says (49:8): *Your hand is on your enemy's neck*, and as *Sifre Zos HaBrachah* maintains, Moses later intimated this in his blessing of Judah: *his hands are sufficient for him* — when he slew Esau. *Tosafos* reconciles that tradition with the one in *Sotah* by suggesting that Esau did not die from Chushim's blow, and it was Judah who delivered the coup de grace [cf. *Yerushalmi Kesubos* 1:5; *Yerushalmi Gittin* 5:7].

Parallel Midrashic accounts [e.g. *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 36] record that Esau was decapitated and his head rolled into the cave, at Jacob's feet. Esau's head was thus buried in the Cave of Machpelah, and his body on Mount Seir. [Cf. however *Yalkut Shimoni* drawing from *Midrash Tehillim* 818 for an opinion that Judah killed Esau on the day that Isaac died. Esau and Jacob had been left alone in the cave to bewail their father; Judah's suspicions that Esau would resort to treachery against Jacob proved correct. When Esau began to attack Jacob, Judah decapitated him.]

Midrash Rabbah 898 records an opinion that it was the Hittites who disrupted the burial and contested Jacob's ownership of the cave. They waited until Naftali returned from Egypt with the deed of sale that confirmed Jacob's rights.

וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת-אֲבִיהֶם וְיָרְאוּ אֶת-יֹסֵף בְּיָמָת אֲבִיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ יִשְׁטַמְנוּ יוֹסֵף וְהָשֵׁב טו

bestowed on Jacob in *Goren Ha-Atad* [v. 11] they gave precedence to his sons, and so here the brothers are mentioned first (*Rashi* from *Sotah* 13a).

In the literal sense the phraseology denotes that on their return the mourners went first and the others followed. This is our custom today as well (*Abarbanel*).

That the Torah specifics all who had gone up with him intimates that despite the battles which Esau's sons had waged against them, no mishap befell any one of the cortege, and everyone who went returned. This was because the merit of Jacob, to whom they were paying homage, stood by those who went up with him (*Ramban* to 49:31; *R' Bachya*; *Midrash*; *Midrash HaChofetz*). The seemingly superfluous phrase after he had buried his father emphasizes that not a single person returned before the burial (*Malbim*; *Haamek Davar*).

Joseph is especially designated as the subject of this verse, and the burial is ascribed to him to stress that he conscientiously fulfilled his oath to the last detail: it was primarily Joseph who attended to the burial; everyone else was merely secondary (*R' Bachya*).

In *Sotah* 13a the brothers are cited as saying, 'Let it be ascribed to Joseph. It is a greater honor for Father that kings, rather than commoners, should engage in his burial.'

That is, though the previous verse uses the plural: they buried him, the intent is that they began the interment, but decided among themselves to let Joseph personally carry it through,

deeming it a greater honor for their father that one of Joseph's stature be personally involved in his burial; see *Sotah* 9b (*Torah Temimah*).

15. Joseph's brothers fear his retribution.

[And] Joseph's brothers perceived [lit. saw] that their father was dead.

Through Joseph's changed conduct they perceived the effect of their father's death. During Jacob's lifetime, they used to dine at Joseph's table and he would receive them with open arms out of deference to his father. After Jacob's death, however, he ceased to invite them (*Rashi* from *Midrash*).

The commentators explain Joseph's change of behavior, maintaining that his intentions were pure. During Jacob's lifetime he had given Joseph prominence over Judah the leader, and Reuben the firstborn, and seated Joseph ahead of them. With his father's demise, however, Joseph felt uncomfortable sitting at the head of the table and he felt it unbecoming that he do so; on the other hand, his royal position mandated that he not relinquish his primary position. To avoid the problem he decreased his invitations to them. The brothers, however, thought he was acting out of hatred for them (*Tanchuma*).

Gur Aryeh suggests that as long as Jacob was alive, Joseph was excessively close to his family, having them as his guests almost constantly. After Jacob died, Joseph still invited them but not as often. The brothers saw something ominous in this.

Alternatively, *Gur Aryeh* comments that he may have ceased all invitations, but not out of antagonism. Joseph knew that as long as Jacob lived, neither he nor his family would suffer persecution in Egypt, but after his death, the oppression could begin. The first symptom of the impending slavery would be that the Egyptians would suspect the Jews of seeking power. If Joseph continued his invitations, the Egyptians would say that the Jews are too close to the throne, and attack them in the palace. Therefore,

Joseph slighted his brothers to avoid grounds for such suspicion.

Another reason for their apprehension offered in *Tanchuma* was that on the return journey, Joseph had them detour to the pit where they had once cast him as a youth before they had sold him to the Ishmaelites. The brothers assumed Joseph's intention was to revive old grudges whereas Joseph sincerely meant to pay tribute to God and recite the blessing *ברוך שׁעָשָׂה לִי גֹס בְּקִקְוֹס הַזֶּה*, *Blessed is He Who performed a miracle for me in this place*.

The Midrash learns from this incident that one should always make his intentions clear. Since Joseph did not explain his actions to his brothers they thought he was acting out of malice and he thereby caused them much needless anxiety.

R' Hirsch observes that after the death of parents, the familial bond holding the children together becomes loosened; with their parents as a focal point, they meet less often and tend to become estranged from one another. That this happened in the case of Joseph and the brothers was quite natural, but the brothers perceived it as a symptom of Jacob's absence and feared that Joseph would recall past grievances.

According to Abarbanel these fears began while they were still in Canaan. The brothers wanted to determine Joseph's intentions; had they ascertained that he intended punitive steps against them, they might have considered remaining in Canaan (*Akeidah*; Abarbanel).

לֹא יִשְׁתַּמְנוּ יוֹסֵף — *Perhaps Joseph will nurse hatred against us*.

The verb *שָׂטַם* denotes *repressed hatred*. [See *comm.* to 27:41 and 49:23].

The simplest syntactical interpretation following Rashi [see below] is that seeing Joseph's

changed demeanor toward them since Jacob's death, the brothers' bad conscience caused them to grow apprehensive that Joseph held a grudge against them and might avenge himself for the evil they had perpetrated against him.

The implications of their father's death dawned on them. The brothers feared that Joseph might act according to popular morality and retaliate. Affection for Jacob might have restrained his revenge as long as the aged father was alive, but now they were completely in his power (*Ibn Caspi*).

The translation of *לֹא* as *may be, perhaps* — *שָׁמָּה* — synonymous with *אולי* follows Rashi.

As Rashi explains, the word *לֹא* has several meanings depending upon the context. Sometimes *לֹא* denotes a petition, synonymous with *הֲלֹאִי*, if only [in the sense of *may it so be*, as for example 30:34; *If only it would remain as you say!* [23:13]; *If only you would heed me* [Joshua 7:7 Numbers 14:2]. In other contexts *לֹא* means *if* and *אולי*, as e.g. Deut. 32:29: *לֹא חִבְּבוּ*, if they were wise they would understand; [Isaiah 48:18; 11 Samuel 18:12]. The meaning of *לֹא* in our verse is synonymous with that of *אולי*, perhaps, and this is the only place in Scripture where *לֹא* has this meaning. The word *אולי* has this meaning in 24:5: *perhaps the woman will not wish to follow me*.

Since, as Rashi asserts, this is the only place in Scripture where *לֹא* is synonymous with *אולי* meaning *perhaps*, why indeed is this term used here instead of the more familiar *אולי* or *הֲלֹאִי*? Possibly the Torah wishes to inform us that in the deeper-sense it is the familiar meaning of *לֹא* — *הֲלֹאִי*, if only — that is alluded to here in the brothers' words. Their inner thought was: *If only Joseph would detest us and pay us back for all the harm which we have caused him!* Then there would no longer be any trace of our sin and we would not fear that it might rebound against our children and

ויחי נ/טו-יז ישיב לנו את כל-הרעה אשר גמלנו טו אתו: ויצו אל-יוסף לאמר אביך צוה ז לפני מותו לאמר: כה-תאמרו ליוסף

our descendants. For as noted in the comm. on p. 1650, the brothers' sin did not go unpunished. Divine justice was meted out centuries later at the time of the Ten Martyrs (*Or HaChaim*).

Interpreting that ישתמנו denotes inner, stifled hatred, and that לו is synonymous with הלואי, if only, *B'Chor Shor* renders: *If only Joseph would keep his anger stifled and not reveal it to repay us in deed for all the evil we did him!*

According to *Akeidas Yitzchak*, the brothers initially were apprehensive that with their father gone Joseph might seek vengeance against them. But upon further consideration they decided that, to the contrary, they were instrumental in his rise to greatness! They therefore concluded: May he repay us for all the 'evil' we caused him! [See continuation of this in v. 13 s.v. רעה.]

Baal HaTurim similarly interprets: May Joseph stifle his anger. However, if he does desire to repay us, then let him repay the so-called 'evil' we did him; for our selling him was instrumental in his eventually becoming a monarch; may he repay us accordingly!

Malbim likewise interprets לו as if only and ישתמנו as hate us; he renders: If only Joseph would hate us [openly] and repay us in kind for all the evil we caused him. The brothers wished that Joseph would stop showering them with undeserved kindnesses. They understood full well that the sweetest revenge is to treat one's enemies with great generosity, because that serves as a constant reminder of the evil they had conspired to do. As King Solomon taught (*Proverbs* 25:21), *If your foe is hungry feed him bread, for you will be pouring coals upon his head.*

According to *Haamek Davar*, לו has the meaning of if as it does in *Deut.* 32:29, and ישתמנו denotes scheming

about revenge as it does in 49:23. While they were certain that Joseph would not sell his brothers into slavery, nevertheless: לו ישתמנו יוסף, if Joseph is scheming to gain revenge against us ויהשב ישיב לנו וכו', then he will certainly find a way to repay us, etc. [*R' Hirsch* interprets similarly.]

והשב ישיב לנו את כל-הרעה אשר גמלנו אתו — And then he will surely repay [lit. return] us all the evil that we did him.

The Hebrew reads and return he will return, etc. The compound verb implies emphasis, hence: surely repay. According to *Sechel Tov* the double verb signifies: he will repay us through our children as well as through ourselves.

— All the evil, our having thrown him into the pit and having sold him as a slave, that we caused him because of his dreams (*Sechel Tov*).

16. ויצו אל-יוסף לאמר — So they instructed that Joseph be told.

The passage literally reads: And they instructed to Joseph saying. The expression ויצו אל [lit. they instructed to] has the same meaning as *Exodus* 6:13: ויצו אל בני ישראל [lit. he instructed them to the children of Israel] which signifies: [God] commanded Moses and Aaron to act as emissaries to the children of Israel. Here too it signifies that they instructed their emissary to Joseph regarding the message he was to speak to him. Who was it they sent? — The sons of Bilhah with whom Joseph had been most accustomed to associate, as it says [37:2]: He was a youth

50 hatred against us and then he will surely repay us all
16-17 the evil that we did him." ¹⁶ So they instructed that
Joseph be told, "Your father gave orders before his
death, saying: ¹⁷ 'Thus shall you say to Joseph: "O

with the sons of Bilhah [i.e., as Rambam explains there: Joseph's youthful recreation time was spent associating with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah] (Rashi from Tanchuma).

According to Tanchuma Yashan it was Bilhah herself — who had raised Joseph after Rachel's death — with whom they entrusted this message.

אביון צוה לפני מותו לאמר — Your father gave orders before his death, saying:

They altered the facts [by stating an untruth] for the sake of peace. Jacob had never given such a command since he did not suspect Joseph of seeking vengeance (Rashi).

Comp. Yevamos 65b: A person may tamper with the truth for the sake of peace as it is written *Your father instructed*, etc. [which was untrue]. [See also Bava Metziah 87a cited in comm. to 18:13 s.v. וְאֵלֶּיךָ וְאֵלֶּיךָ.]

The brothers never dared reveal to Jacob that Joseph had been sold. They were mortally afraid that if told of their sin Jacob would curse them as he did Reuben, Simeon, and Levi [49:3]. Joseph, too, did not tell him for ethical reasons. It is because Jacob remained ignorant of the true facts that they had to fabricate Jacob's instructions. Had he

known the truth, his sons would certainly have asked him to instruct Joseph to act kindly toward them after his death, rather than resort to this fabrication (Ramban to 46:1).¹¹

[However, cf. Pesikta cited in 48:19 where Jacob intimates that he was aware that his jealous sons sold Joseph.]

According to Sforzo, the emissaries were instructed to say *Your father ordered before his death, to say*; that is, he commanded us to say the entire following statement to you in our own name, not in his, for he never suspected you of anything. He rather indicated that if we had any fears we should tell you the following.

The brothers phrase the message as *your father*, not *our father*; in their contrition they felt unworthy to call themselves Jacob's sons (R' Hirsch).

By emphasizing that Jacob had said this *before his death* they implied that it was incumbent upon Joseph to fulfill a deathbed command (Abarbanel).

17. כה תאמר ליוסף — Thus shall you say to Joseph:

Should you ever become apprehensive ... (Sforzo).

1. Some commentators suggest, however, that since Joseph did not leave his father's bedside for a moment before his demise, their story must have been based on an instruction Jacob had given — at least by implication — before his death that the brothers preserve their unity; by implication he had as much as commanded that Joseph not be angry with them.

Yalkut Yehudah cites in this connection the Midrashic interpretation of Jacob's deathbed summons to his sons in 49:1: וְאֵלֶּיךָ וְאֵלֶּיךָ, i.e., let there be no quarreling among you ... gather yourselves together in brotherly unity.

Haamek Davar derives this from Jacob's blessing [49:24] in which he praised Joseph for not being vengeful against those who had treated him bitterly. [Thus by implication Jacob was hinting that even after his death Joseph should maintain peaceful relations with his brothers.]

אָנאָ שָׂא נָא פֶּשַׁע אַחֶיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי־
רָעָה גַּמְלוּךָ וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא לְפֶשַׁע עַבְדֶּי
אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ וַיִּכַּךְ יוֹסֵף בְּדִבְרָם אֵלָיו:
וַיֵּלְכוּ גַם־אֶחָיו וַיִּפְּלוּ לִפְנֵי וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִנֵּנוּ

אָנאָ שָׂא נָא פֶּשַׁע אַחֶיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם — O please, kindly forgive [lit. bear if you please] the spiteful deed of your brothers and their sin.

[פֶּשַׁע, *spiteful deed* or *transgression*, signifies a worse offense than חַטָּא, *sin*, in that the former is committed in a spirit of *rebellion*, while the latter denotes an *inadvertent* trespass. (See *comm.* to *Exodus* 34:7 where the various terms for sin are defined.)]

Their act of selling Joseph comprised both פֶּשַׁע, *intentional transgression* and חַטָּא, *unintentional trespass*. Since they were his brothers, their act was ruthless, and is therefore referred to as פֶּשַׁע אַחֶיךָ, *the intentional transgression of your brothers*. However, since at the same time they acted out of sincere conviction that Joseph was persecuting them they were acting in self-defense [see footnote to 37:18], and accordingly, theirs was a חַטָּא, *unintentional sin* (*Alshich*; cf. *Malbim*. See *Overview* to *Vayeishev*).

Sechel Tov interprets that *spiteful deed* refers to their having cast him into the pit, and *sin* to their having sold him.

The Sages in the Talmud [*Yoma* 87a] derive from the thrice-repeated word נָא [(once as אָנאָ, twice as נָא) — signifying entreaty (*Rashi* ad loc.) —] that when one seeks his neighbor's pardon he need not beseech him more than three times [see *Maharsha*].

[The 'trop' musical cantillation on the word נָא, O please, is a *pazer*, one of the more intense and sustained of the

cantillations. This emphasizes the intensity of their plea.]

The verb שָׂא, *forgive*, literally means *carry* since by forgiving one 'lifts up' the transgression from the sinner and lightens his burden, figuratively 'bearing' it for him. See *Ibn Caspi* to 4:13, and *comm.* to 32:21.

בִּי־רָעָה גַּמְלוּךָ — For they have done you evil.

The Hebrew expression [lit. for they have "recompensed" you evil] denotes undeserved evil (*HaRechashim leBikah*).

An integral part of asking forgiveness is that one acknowledge wrongdoing (*R' Shmuel ben Chofni*).

— וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא לְפֶשַׁע עַבְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ — So now, please forgive the spiteful deed of the servants of your father's God.

This was to be added by the emissary as if it were a personal plea (*Chizkuni*; *Akeidah*).

— Even though your father is dead, his God is living and they are His servants (*Rashi*).

— In the final analysis, though they acted with sinful intention, they were God's 'servants' inasmuch as they were instruments He employed to exalt you to this lofty position (*Abarbanel*).

[See *comm.* of *Ashtuc*: *Midrashei HaTorah* cited in *comm.* to 45:5.]

— Even if they were not your brothers, they are of your father's faith. You have a spiritual fraternity

50 please, kindly forgive the spiteful deed of your
18 brothers and their sin for they have done you evil; so
now, please forgive the spiteful deed of the servants
of your father's God.' " And Joseph wept when they
spoke to him.

¹⁸ His brothers themselves also went and flung
themselves before him and said, "We are ready to be

and should be forgiving (Michlol Yofi).

וַיִּכְרֹם יוֹסֵף בְּדִבְרֵם אֲלֵיוֹ — And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

— Because he was suspected of evil intent (*Pesikta Zutresa*).

If one is suspected of impropriety it is proper for him to weep over it. So do we find in *Yoma* 19b that when the elders would adjure the High Priest not to act in the manner of the Sadducees when performing the Yom Kippur service, he would weep that they suspected him of considering such sacrilege (*Yalkut Yehudah; Haamek Davar*).

— As soon as they mentioned his father, he wept out of sheer love, and his compassion was aroused. However, we find it nowhere specifically mentioned that Joseph formally forgave them. They technically remained unforgiven until their dying day. Their sin was eventually atoned for with the death of the Ten Martyrs centuries later. Thus their punishment was postponed until centuries later. This is consistent with the principle that God visits the sin of the father on the children (*R' Bachya*). [See *comm.* to p. 1650.]

Other opinions regarding whether Joseph had forgiven his brothers include that of *R' Yehudah HaChassid* [*Sefer Chassidim* ed. Mekitzei Nirdamim p. 437] who maintains that since Joseph attributed to Divine Providence that their bad deeds ultimately resulted in good, they were absolved as far as Joseph was concerned, but not with respect to God. [See also *B'chor Shor, OrHaChaim* and *Zohar*.]

According to *Sforno* [in continuation of his *comm.* above, end of v. 16], Joseph wept sentimentally at their mention of the beloved Jacob and that he had refused to suspect Joseph of scheming against his brothers.

Tz'ror HaMor maintains that Joseph wept because this message made it apparent that they had told Jacob of the sale, while Joseph had always taken pains to spare his father the grief of learning of it.

וַיִּלְכוּ גַם-אֲחָיו וַיִּפְּלוּ לִפְנָיו. — [And] his brothers themselves also went and flung themselves before him.

I.e., in addition to their emissaries, the brothers themselves also went ... (*Rashi*).

The syntax seems to imply that the emissaries returned to the brothers and reported that Joseph did not answer them but merely wept. *B'chor Shor* writes that the brothers took this as a sign that Joseph bore them no malice and they felt it was safe to go to him and fling themselves down before him in obeisance and gratitude. [*Sechel Tov* derives from this that proper etiquette requires that even if one's trespass is forgiven through an emissary, the trespasser should still appear personally before the other.]

Or, as *Haamek Davar* suggests, the brothers did not know how to interpret Joseph's weeping. They were concerned that he wept because the emissaries reminded him of the tribulations he had suffered at their hands. If so, they might be in greater danger and they decided to beseech him on their own behalf.

The word גם, also, could refer to the bowing down as well: The brothers

ויחי נ/יט-כ
 יט לָךְ לְעֶבְדִּים: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף אֶל-
 כ תִּירָאוּ כִּי הִתַּחַת אֱלֹהִים אָנִי: וְאַתֶּם
 חֲשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה אֱלֹהִים חֲשַׁבָה לְטֹבָה

went and bowed, just as the emissary had done. According to the view cited above that the emissary was Bilhah [cf. also *Targum Yonasan*], these events might have been in fulfillment of Joseph's dream wherein the 'moon' and the eleven 'stars' prostrated themselves before him (*Oznaim L'Torah*).

הֲנֵנּוּ לָךְ לְעֶבְדִּים — *We are ready to be your slaves.*

— Because we once sold you into slavery. Enslave us and let that be our punishment — measure for measure — and not some other punishment (*R' Avraham b. Ha-Rambam*).

According to *Haamek Davar*, the brothers were, as noted above, fearful that Joseph had wept at the memory of his earlier tribulations and would now repay them by selling them as slaves. So they anticipated him by saying, 'You need not think of measures to requite us for having sold you; we are quite ready to be your slaves!'

19. Joseph reassures them.

אֶל-תִּירָאוּ — *Fear not.*

Of what you suspect I might be thinking (*Haamek Davar*).

אֶל-תִּירָאוּ — *For am I instead [following Rashi in 30:2; lit. beneath] of God?*

— Have I the power to harm you even if I wanted to? [As Joseph continues in the next verse:] You all devised harm for me [and I am but an individual], yet [you did not succeed because] God turned it to good; how then could I alone

[without God's consent; not being in His stead] harm you all? [Therefore: Fear not] (*Rashi*).

B'Chor Shor interprets: Am I in God's stead that I have the authority to harm you? I do not even have a valid claim against you since your evil intentions were turned to good. Moreover, people would accuse me of betrayal, saying that I brought you here under my trust and now I harmed you.

[Many of the consoling statements Joseph now makes echo those he made when he first identified himself to his brothers. See specifically 45:5-9.]

Sforno: Am I then a judge in His stead that I should analyze His decrees and punish those who acted as His agents, as though I were presiding over a court that had authority to annul His decrees? You certainly acted merely as His agents as I once told you [45:8]: *It was not you who sent me here but God.*¹¹

Cf. Malbim: Having witnessed the Providential effects of the matter, how can I purport to analyze God's ways; can I thwart His obvious will? Moreover, since you have not harmed me, I have no right to inflict 'evil' on you unless it results in goodness, like the 'evil' you did to me — but *am I in God's stead* that I can know if the evil I do you would indeed result in your benefit?

According to *Ibn Ezra*: *Am I then in God's stead* — that you flung yourselves before me and offered

1. [The moral implications of their having to account for being the tools with which the Divine Plan was executed have been discussed in the footnote to 45:5.]

50 your slaves." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Fear not,
19-20 for am I instead of God? ²⁰ Although you intended
me harm God intended it for good: in order to ac-

yourselves as my slaves!

Akeidah interprets differently: You certainly need neither my forgiveness nor my reassurance; nor, on the other hand, are you worthy of receiving a reward from me. *For am I in God's stead* that I should thank you for having been instrumental in realizing His plan, since when in reality [next verse:] your intentions were evil and designed to harm me; it was God Who intended for good, not only for me personally but for the general welfare to sustain an entire populace ... Nevertheless, [v. 21]: *Fear not* ...

— God can judge thoughts and intentions. I, as a human being, can only consider the result. As a result of your deed I owe you deep gratitude! (*R' Hirsch*).

The interpretation of this phrase as an incredulous rhetorical question follows *Rashi* and most commentators. [The ה of הַחֵחֵחַ punctuated as it is with a *chataf patach* indicates a question = הַשְׁאֵלָה, interrogative particle; see *Rashi* to השפּט in 15:25].

Sechel Tov, however, perceives the prefix ה to be a הַקְרָיָה, *interjectional particle*, and interprets the statement in an affirmative sense: *Fear not for I am indeed in God's stead!* — That is, I emulate His ways. Just as He overlooks transgressions, so do I.

Divrei Shaul interprets homiletically: "Am only I beneath God?" Is it only I who is beneath His Providential care

and not you? Of course not! His care encompasses all of you. Therefore, *Fear not!*^[21]

This was the same response an angry Jacob had once given the barren Rachel when she had demanded children of him [30:2]. As *Ramban* there notes, the Sages took Jacob to task, stating in the Midrash: The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to Jacob, 'Is this the way to answer an aggrieved person? By your life! Your children [by your other wives] are destined to stand humbly before her son Joseph [i.e., they will be brought to such despair that they will need this assurance].

20. — וְאַתֶּם חֲשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה וְכו' —
Although you intended me harm
[lit. and you thought evil onto me]
God intended it for good.

[As *Rashi* explains the continuity above: How then could you fear reprisals by me! When all of you intended to do me harm God thwarted you and turned it to good, so how could God permit me — as an individual — to do harm to all of you?]

— Accordingly, you did not sin; God providentially guided you, for He intended it for your good (*Rashbam*).

You are like a person who intended to pass someone a cup of poison, but inadvertently gave him wine instead: he is free and guiltless even of Heavenly judgment (*Or HaChaim*).

Bais Yitzchak objects to *Or HaChaim*'s thesis that there is no sin involved in the switch from poison to wine. The Sages [*Kiddushim* 81b] teach

1. *Torah Sheleimah* cites the following Midrash from *Tz'ror HaMor*:

'Am I in God's stead to harm you; you who personify the purpose of the entire universe!' As our Sages observed: There are twelve hours in the day; twelve hours in the night; twelve constellations; twelve months in the year; and Aaron's breastplate consisted of twelve stones corresponding to the Tribes. Am I then God, that I should presume to be capable to overthrow the order of the universe?' [Comp. the *Midrash*].

ויחי נ/כא *שביעי בא *ועתה אל-תיראו אנכי אכלכל אתכם ואת-טפכם וינחם אותם וידבר על-למען עשה כיום הזה להחית עם-רב:

that if someone meant to eat pork but picked up beef by mistake he must repent. *Bais Yitzchak* explains that the Sages refer only to a case where someone intended to sin, but if he had intended to use the pork for something that he considered to be a *mitzvah* (עבדה לשמה), no repentance is required; neither in thought nor in deed was there a sin. Since the brothers were convinced that they acted properly in the case of Joseph, *Or HaChaim* maintains that they were completely blameless.

[See *Akeidah's* interpretation, end of last verse.]

Sforno interprets: Your action was motivated by error: You thought that I was persecuting you [interpreting: you attributed wickedness to me]; had this been true, you would have been justified to act in self-defense against me. But God intended it for good — He guided your deed to create a beneficial outcome.

— למען עשה כיום הזה להחית עם-רב — *In order to accomplish — it is as clear as this day — that a vast people be kept alive* [lit. in order to do like this day to keep alive a vast people.]

The reference to *vast people* obviously included the general populace who Joseph sustained. However, the intention of God's Providence in engineering all these events was, as noted in 45:6, primarily directed at the preservation of Jacob's family — who would multiply miraculously in Egypt and become a great people. Compare Joseph's earlier statement in 45:7 *God has sent me ahead of you to insure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance.*

According to *R' Shmuel b. Chof-*

ni, the term *vast people* refers to the offspring of the Tribes. Joseph's descendants, the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim, used a similar expression to Joshua [Joshua 17:4]: ואני עם רב, and I am a vast or great people.

The expression כיום הזה [lit. like this day] is ambiguous.

The translation follows *R' Saadiah Gaon* who renders: In order to accomplish what you are witnessing today, i.e., what is, in retrospect, now clear as this day.

[The expression denotes exceptional clarity. Comp. *Rashi* to 25:31.]

21. —ועתה אל-תיראו. [And] so now, fear not.

Joseph found it necessary to reiterate that they need not entertain any fears although he had said it to them earlier in v. 19. For they still could have been fearful that, despite his assurance that he had no plans to take *revenge* on them, it did not necessarily mean that he would continue supporting them.

Minchah Belulah perceives the prophetic connotation to be: Now you need not fear; but in the days of the Ten Martyrs [when your descendants will be punished for your evil deed (see comm. to p. 1650)] there will be cause for fear.

— אני אכלכל אתכם ואת טפכם — I [the pronoun is emphatic: I personally] will sustain you and your little ones.

— Since it is clear that that was God's reason for sending me here [see 45:7] (*Alshich*).

— I will provide for you — during the duration of the renewed famine. For according to *Tosefta Sotah*,

50 *comply — it is as clear as this day — that a vast people*
21 *be kept alive. ²¹ So now, fear not — I will sustain you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and appealed to their emotions.*

after Jacob died, the famine — which had ceased with Jacob's arrival in the second year of the hunger — resumed [and lasted for another five years to complete the foretold total of seven years]. According to *Sifre Eikev* 838 this resumption of the famine is inferred from our verse. This is derived from the fact that the verb *אָכַל*, *provide/sustain* is used both here and above in 45:11, implying that the same conditions prevailed in both instances. 'Now just as the term *provide* above refers to years of famine, so does that term in our verse refer to the renewed years of famine.' [See *Ramban* 47:18].

Sechel Tov observes that for presumptuously saying that he would provide for his brothers, rather than attributing sustenance to God Who provides for all life, Joseph was punished and he died before all his brothers (see footnote to v. 2 above for other opinions regarding Joseph's premature death).

The term *כלכל* refers to providing for one's individualized needs (*Radak*).

וַיְנַחֵם אוֹתָם וַיִּדְבֶּר עִלֵּיהֶם — *Thus he comforted them and appealed to their emotions.*

Literally: *And he spoke upon their hearts* — i.e., persuasive words that settle upon [lit. *are received upon*] the heart [the heart being considered in Scripture as the seat of the emotions and reason]: "Before you came, people spread rumors that I was a slave; your coming showed I was born free. If I kill you people will say: 'They were not his brothers at all! He saw a group of fine young men and passed them off as his brothers, but when he had no further need for them, he killed them. Have you ever heard of a man killing his brothers!'" (*Midrash; Rashi*).¹¹

Rashi cites from *Megillah* 16b an alternative sample of the reassuring words he addressed to them: 'If ten lights could not extinguish one light, how could one light extinguish ten?' [I.e., obviously it cannot, for it is not within the nature of a light to *extinguish* another light; to the contrary one *kindles* a light from another. Such, too, is the expected relationship of brothers (see *Maharsha*)].

The Midrashim record many other arguments used by Joseph to convince them that, as absolute ruler of Egypt, he could have done

1. The question arises: Having already assured his brothers countless times that he meant them no harm, why did he still have to 'appeal to their emotions'?

However [as observed by *Malbim* at the end of v. 15] it is uncomfortable for someone to be showered with kindness by a person he has wronged. They therefore needed the intellectual and emotional consolation Joseph gave them in order to be absolutely convinced that their relationship was beneficial to Joseph as well, and it was important to him for all to know they were his brothers (*Beer Yitzchak*).

Furthermore, according to *HaKsav V'Hakabbalah* and *Alshich* it was necessary for him to console them at this point so that they would not feel humiliated at being dependent upon his support, especially in view of their guilt feelings. Joseph went out of his way to soothe their emotions and convince them of his sincerity, so they would regard themselves as if self-sustaining.

ויחי נ/כב־כד בב לָקַם: וַיֵּשֶׁב יוֹסֵף בְּמִצְרַיִם הוּא וּבֵיתוֹ
 אָבִיו וַיְחִי יוֹסֵף מֵאָה וָעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים: וַיָּרָא כג
 יוֹסֵף לְאֶפְרַיִם בְּנֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים גַּם בְּנֵי מְכִיר מַפְטִיר
 בֶּן־מְנַשֶּׁה יָלְדוּ עַל־בְּרָכִי יוֹסֵף: וַיֹּאמֶר כד
 יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו אֲנֹכִי מֵת וְאַלֹהִים פָּקֹד

away with them easily, had he wanted to. The fact was that he had no evil designs against them. The brothers finally recognized his sincerity. He removed their last doubts and they were comforted.

[On the use of the idiom *speaking upon the heart* to connote *consoling words*, see *Isaiah* 40:2 and *Ruth* 2:13].

22. Joseph in Egypt.

The narrative now reverts to Joseph and sums up his life after his father's demise (*Abarbanel*).

— וַיֵּשֶׁב יוֹסֵף בְּמִצְרַיִם הוּא וּבֵיתוֹ אָבִיו
 [And] *Joseph dwelt in Egypt — he and his father's household.*

The continuity is: Having established a full fraternal harmony with his brothers that was greater in many respects than it had ever been before, *Joseph dwelt in Egypt* — in peace and contentment — *together with his brothers* (*Tzror HaMor*).

That *Joseph dwelt* (וַיֵּשֶׁב) in Egypt is obvious. *Lekach Tov* perceives it to mean: *He created settlements* [יְשׁוּבִים] in Egypt — erecting houses and other structures.

וַיֵּשֶׁב frequently implies: *he settled*. Joseph settled down in exile, remembering the Divine words addressed to his father: 'Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I shall make you into a great nation there' (46:3). None of Jacob's descendants looked for ways of leaving Egypt. They resolved to trust in God's words and to wait for the End that He had promised. Joseph felt that this End could not be too far off, since the "fourth generation" was approaching, and God had announced to return that

generation to Canaan (15:16). Joseph was satisfied to tell his brothers how the arrival of the future Redemption could be recognized. It was his last act before his death [verse 24] (*R' Munk* from *Zohar*).

According to *Abarbanel's* view that the preceding occurred while the family was still in Canaan and the brothers were entertaining the notion that if Joseph was indeed ill-disposed toward them they would not return to Egypt, this verse describes how they all returned together to Egypt after Joseph succeeded in reassuring them. (Cf. *Abarbanel; Oznaïm L'Torah*).

— וַיְחִי יוֹסֵף מֵאָה וָעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים And
Joseph lived one hundred and ten years.

Every one of the years were truly 'lived' — he enjoyed vigorous health (*Zohar*; cf. *R' Shmuel b. Chofni*).

Since Joseph ascended to rulership at the age of 30 [see 41:46], he ruled for a total of 80 years — longer than anyone before him, and rarely duplicated (*Abarbanel; Malbim*).

However, Joseph's lifespan was the shortest of his brothers, and though he was among the youngest, he died first. See footnote to v. 2 above, and comm. to *Exodus* 1:6.

— וַיָּרָא יוֹסֵף לְאֶפְרַיִם בְּנֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים
Joseph saw [i.e., lived to see] three generations [lit. children of the third] through Ephraim.

That is, although Joseph died before any of his brothers, he lived to see Ephraim's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. (Cf. *Ibn Ezra; Radak*

50 ²² Joseph dwelt in Egypt — he and his father's household — and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years.

²³ Joseph saw three generations through Ephraim; even the sons of Machir son of Manasseh were raised on Joseph's knees.

²⁴ Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die,

to II Kings 10:30; Shaarei Aharon; Karnei Or; R' Shmuel b. Chofni; R' Bachya; Rivash; Moshav Zekein-im.)

In some Chumashim the final mem of the word מְשָׁלִים is enlarged; Minchas Shay disapproves and maintains that in correctly written Torah Scrolls the letter is of normal size.

גַּם בְּנֵי מַכִּיר בֶּן־מְנַשֶּׁה יָלְדוּ עַל־כְּרֵביוֹ — Even the sons of Machir son of Manasseh were raised [lit. born] on Joseph's knees.

The idiomatic expression יָלְדוּ עַל־כְּרֵביוֹ [lit. were born upon Joseph's knees] is to be interpreted as Onkelos renders it: were raised between his knees [a figurative expression meaning: grew up during his lifetime and raised under his spiritual guidance] (Rashi).

According to Targum Yonasan, it alludes to the circumcision of his grandchildren, which was carried out by Joseph himself. *Sechel Tov* suggests that the idiom on Joseph's knees implies that Joseph was the *sandek* at the circumcision of his grandchildren. [See note loc. cit. in *Yayin HaTov*.]

Thus, in the case of Manasseh, Joseph lived to see Manasseh's grandchildren — [in Scriptural terms: בְּנֵי שְׁנֵיִם, lit. children of the second generation (Rashbam)] — a reference to Gilead, Machir's son (Numbers 26:29). Though Manasseh was the elder of the brothers, we see that Joseph saw an additional generation from Ephraim. Already

in Joseph's lifetime we see evidence of Jacob's prognostication that Ephraim would surpass Manasseh (48:19) (Rashbam; R' Bachya; cf. sources cited above).

The term גַּם, also, denotes that Ephraim's offspring as well as Manasseh's were brought up in Joseph's house. Only Manasseh's offspring are specifically mentioned as having been raised on Joseph's knees because of Joseph's love for him as the firstborn. The phrase "sons of Machir" refers primarily to Gilead, the grandfather of the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1); this indicates that the righteous Joseph raised wholly righteous descendants in his house from whom descended these women who were wise and pious in their generation [see *Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:11] (R' Bachya).

The beautiful point has been made that the sons of Machir were contemporaries of Moses [Numbers 26:29ff], the foretold fourth generation [15:16] which was to be liberated from Egypt. As children they had seen Joseph, the pride and glory of their people in Egypt; they would live to see the redemption and the Promised Land.

24. Joseph imparts signs of the Redemption to his brothers and adjures them to bury his remains in Eretz Yisrael.

מָחָא אָנֹכִי מָת — I am about to die.

This teaches that he gathered

יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם וְהִעֲלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם

them all at the time of his death and charged them as a father charges his children (*Sechel Tov*).

[The year was 2309; fifty-four years since Jacob's death in 2255.]

His brothers were all alive for they survived him [as implied by the fact that the Torah tells us in this verse that he addressed *his brothers*; and that in *Exodus* 1:6 Joseph's death is mentioned before his brothers. Joseph died prematurely as noted in footnote to v. 2 above.] He wanted to be sure that his bones would be taken to Canaan but he knew that this could not be done until the Exodus, [as explained in comm. to v. 25]. Therefore, he wanted to assure himself that the departing Jews would take his remains with them. Seeing that his brothers were old [Reuben, the oldest, was 116] and realizing that they would not survive until the Exodus, Joseph administered an oath to them that they would transmit to their descendants (*Ramban*).

וְאֱלֹהִים פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם — *But God will surely remember you.* [The verb is repeated for emphasis, literally, *remember He will remember you.*]

The continuity is: Joseph knew from his father that future generations would remain enslaved in Egypt. Therefore, he now comforted them: *I will die and will be unable to help you any longer, but do not despair — God will surely remember you, etc.* (*Abarbanel*).

❖ The words "Pakod Yifkod," identify the Redeemer.

During the last moments of his life, Jacob had imparted to Joseph

some secret signs of the future redemption from Egypt, which Joseph now transmitted to his brothers. The words in our verse [although not recorded above in Jacob's name] were a direct quotation from Jacob. As noted with reference to Noah in 8:3 and the barren Sarah in 20:1, the term פֶּקֶד like זָכַר usually announces the appearance of Divine Providence. The figurative implication is that God will manifest His Providence as if He 'remembered' to carry out an earlier plan or promise. Since a long span of time elapses between the promise and the event, God is spoken of as 'remembering,' as if He were a human being who forgot a promise and then, after a lapse, remembered to carry it out. Obviously, however, such an expression cannot be taken literally since God cannot forget.

As we will see in *Exodus* 3:16, the words פֶּקֶד פֶּקַדְתִּי, *I have indeed remembered* were pivotal in the acceptance by the Israelites of Moses' announcement of the impending redemption.

For, when Moses was given the mission to go and deliver the Jews from bondage, God promised him: 'They will listen to you.' *Rashi* explains: As soon as you address them with the words פֶּקֶד פֶּקַדְתִּי, *I have indeed remembered you*, they will listen to your voice, for this sign has been passed on to them from the time of Jacob and Joseph. They know that these are the words that will herald the redemption. For both Jacob and Joseph said יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם, *God will surely remember you.* (The first time Joseph says it in v. 24, he

50 but God will surely remember you and bring you up out of this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

is quoting his father; when he repeats it in v. 25 it is in the context of his own request (*Mizrachi*; see *Ramban* to *Exodus* 3:19.)

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 48 maintains that this proof of the "authentic language of Redemption" had originally been revealed to Abraham and then transmitted successively to Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, who entrusted it to his brothers. It ultimately reached Serach, daughter of Asher. She enjoyed exceptional longevity [as noted in the *comm.* to 45:26] and was the only one of Jacob's grandchildren still alive in the time of Moses. When Moses came to the Israelite elders, they asked Serach to verify whether Moses' words corresponded to the secret tradition that she had received. When she replied affirmatively, the elders believed him.^[1]

The double phraseology *pakod yifkod* implies a "double remembrance." God would remember them twice — in the days of Moses and throughout their many Exiles culminating in the days of the Messiah. Moreover, He would remember them in

Tishrei and Nissan: their servitude ended in the months of Tishrei and they were liberated in Nissan (*Midrash HaGadol*).

וְהֵעֵלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת — And [He will] bring you up out of this land.

[This promise that God will one day bring them up out of the land is yet another indication that some form of bondage had already begun although, as the Sages maintain, it was not severe until all the Tribal Ancestors died.]

By the expression *and bring you up* Joseph intimated to his brothers that their physical remains too would eventually be brought up from Egypt. Indeed, this occurred. At the Exodus, each tribe took along the remains of its ancestor (*Sechel Tov*). [R' Bachya to v. 25 citing *Peskita* derives this exegesis from the word אֶתְכֶם in *Exodus* 13:19; see *Rashi* there.]

אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לֵימְעַקְבֹּ — To the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

1. The numerical value of the word פָּקֹד spelled 'full' equals 190; יָקֹד can be translated *shall cause to be missed*, as in *Numbers* 31:49: וְלֹא נִקְדַּר מִקֶּטַּן אִישׁ and *not one man of us is missing*. Thus, these two words prophetically imply that God will surely 'remember' the enslaved Jews and shorten their bondage ["cause it to be missed"] by 190 years (i.e., יָקֹד = פָּקֹד = He will "reduce" by 190), for at the Covenant Between the Parts it was foretold to Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved 400 years. This calculation began from the birth of Isaac. God subtracted 190 years from the period and He liberated them after only 210 years (see *comm.* to *ru* in 42:2).

This premature redemption by God is also celebrated in allegorical terms in *Song of Songs* 2:8: Hark! The sound of my Beloved! Behold He comes! Leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills (see *comm.* to *ArtScroll Shir Hashirim*) (*Tanchuma*; *Midrash Aggadah*).

The *Midrashim* also elicit from this a warning that the Jews should not seek to liberate themselves prematurely from Egypt, but wait until God would remember and redeem them — not like the Ephraimites who attempted to liberate themselves prematurely before the Providential End [cf. *Rashi Exod.* 15:14] (see *Baal HaTurim*; *Meshech Chochmah*).

[For a further discussion of the 'shortening' of the Exile, see *ArtScroll Haggadah* pp 95-98; *Haggadah Treasury* pp. 65-67. This will be dealt with in depth in the *comm.* and *Overview to Exodus*.]

ויחי כה לִיצְחָק וְלִיעֲקֹב: וַיִּשָּׁבַע יוֹסֵף אֶת־בְּנֵי
נ/כה־כו יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם
כו וְהֶעֱלֵתֶם אֶת־עַצְמֹתַי מִזֶּה: וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף

— Each of them individually on various repetitive occasions (*Akeidah*).

If any 'prophet' ever arises claiming that he will redeem you and lead you to a country other than *Eretz Yisrael*, do not believe him (*Tanchuma*).

[On the use of a father's first name by his son see *comm.* to 49:31. Briefly, as *Ritva* maintains, the Patriarchs bore names given them by God and this allowed the sons to mention them.]

25. וַיִּשָּׁבַע יוֹסֵף אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר —
— Then Joseph adjured the children of Israel saying.

He had them vow that they would administer the oath from generation to generation [לֵאמֹר] until it could be fulfilled. He said: "Just as Father made me swear, and I kept that oath, so do I adjure you and your offspring and expect you to fulfill your oath." And so it was: *Moses took the bones of Joseph with him for he had strongly adjured [הִשָּׁבַע הִשְׁבִּיעַ] the children of Israel saying, God will surely remember you and you shall carry my bones up from here with you [Exodus. 13:19; as Rashi explains there, the double phraseology implies: 'He made them swear to in turn make their children swear.'] (Midrash HaGadol; Sechel Tov).*

וְהָיָה כִּי יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם — When God will indeed remember you.

[The syntax of the translation: *when ... then ...* follows R' *Avraham b. HaRambam*; R' *Saadia Gaon* and R' *Shmuel b. Chofni* (comp. also *Daas Zekeinim*). It avoids the difficulty that this phrase

seems to be repeated from the previous verse. In v. 24 Joseph transmitted his father's prophetic promise that God would certainly 'remember' their plight and free them from bondage in Egypt. In this verse he continues: "When He does so, please be sure to take my remains out of here with you." For as *Mizrachi* cited above mentions, in v. 24 Joseph cited his father's prophetic words, now he repeats it as his own statement of fact.]

וְהָעֵלָהֶם אֶת־עַצְמֹתַי מִזֶּה — Then you must bring my bones up out of here.

By using the term *my bones* instead of *my body* it was clear that Joseph — unlike his father — was not requesting that they bury him in *Eretz Yisrael* immediately after his death.

But why *didn't* Joseph make his sons swear that they would take him to Canaan *immediately*, as Jacob had done? Joseph said: "I am a ruler in Egypt and I had sufficient authority to fulfill my father's wish to bring his body to Canaan. But the Egyptians would not let my sons do this for me after I die." He therefore made his brothers take an oath that when they were liberated his remains would accompany them (*Rashi* to *Exod. 13:19; Mechilta*).

As *Ramban* to 49:31 explains, Pharaoh's courtiers would never have allowed Joseph's body to be removed for burial to Canaan since Joseph was a source of pride to them. Furthermore, if all his kin were to accompany him, the Egyptian populace would pillage what-

50 ²⁵ Then Joseph adjured the children of Israel saying
 25-26 "When God will indeed remember you, then you
 must bring my bones up out of here."

²⁶ Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten

ever they had left at home [since the Egyptians would no longer fear retribution as they did when Joseph was alive]. As for possibly having others transport him there, it would not have been proper for him to be buried by strangers (*Ramban* 49:31).

The reason Joseph did not adjure his own sons exclusively was because he knew that a portion of his descendants — half the tribe of Manasseh — would inherit territory across the Jordan and they might want to bury him near them instead of bringing him to Eretz Yisrael proper. He therefore addressed his oath to the children of Israel that they bury him. And so it was; Moses took responsibility for his bones (*Meshech Chochmah*).

Joseph did not ask to be buried in the Cave of Machpelah because he knew by tradition that no one but the three Patriarchs and three Matriarchs were to be buried there. He requested only that his bones be brought up for burial in the Holy Land, but did not specify a site. They were to bury him wherever they wished (*Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon b. Yochai* cited by *Ramban* in 49:31).

[We find in *Joshua* that Joseph's bones were finally buried in Shechem. Either, as implied in *Rashi* to 48:22, it was a tradition that Jacob gave Joseph the city of Shechem — שכם אחר על אהיק — as a burial site, or as the Talmud [*Sotah* 13b] suggests, the tribes wanted to make amends, at least in part, by burying him with full honors at the

very place where they had betrayed him (see *Rashi* to *Joshua* 24:32).]

The reason Joseph adjured his brothers to go to the trouble of transporting his remains to Eretz Yisrael though he knew that the righteous will in any event become transported and resurrected there, was because he wished to avoid the pain of rolling through the underground cavities to reach Eretz Yisrael for the Resurrection (*Yalkut Shimoni*; cf. *Kesubos* 111a; see *comm.* to 47:30).

In any event, it has been emphasized above that all the Patriarchs and the great Sages longed for burial in the Holy Land.

Rambam in *Hilchos Melachim* 5:11 writes that whoever is buried in Eretz Yisrael is granted absolution, as it says וְכַפֵּר אֶרְכָּחוֹ עִמּוֹ, His land makes expiation for His people [*Deut.* 32:43]. Although one who is buried there after death cannot be compared to one who lived there, many Sages arranged for their bodies to be taken to the Holy Land, following the examples of Joseph and Jacob (*R' Munk*).

26. The death of Joseph.

וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף בְּרֵמָאָה וָעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים — [And] Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years.

Joseph's age is mentioned again to emphasize that his reign lasted for the unusually long, uninterrupted period of eighty years. (*R' Shmuel b. Chofni*).

In *v.* 22 his lifespan was mentioned in relating the years of his life; here it is repeated in the context of his death (*Abarbanel*).

As *R' Munk* writes, the Torah

בֶּן־מֶאָה וְעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים נִחְנָטוּ אֹתוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאֵרוֹן בְּמִצְרַיִם:

ויחי

frequently provides details of this kind that help us put Biblical events in historical perspective. Joseph survived his father by fifty-four years. As viceroy, he had presided over the destiny of Egypt for 80 consecutive years [he had been 30 years old when he appeared before Pharaoh (41:46)]. Joseph's death was 71 years after Jacob's arrival in Egypt, and during this time Jacob's family had led a peaceful existence, which was to continue for another 23 years until the death of Levi, Jacob's last surviving son. The 116 years of slavery and servitude began only after this happy period of 94 years (*Rashi* on *Exodus* 6:16). The period of slavery and oppression, which was to have lasted 400 years (15:13), was, as noted earlier, shortened to 210 years.

Some commentators perceive the phrase וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף as a homiletical praise: *He died as 'Joseph'*. Although he ruled for eighty years and Pharaoh had changed his name to *Tzafenas Paan'each*, Joseph still retained his Hebrew name. Thereby he set an example to his brethren to retain their Hebrew identity. The Sages maintain that the Israelite resolve not to drop their Hebrew names throughout the Egyptian servitude was one of the merits for which they deserved Redemption (see *Pardes Yosef*).

וַיִּחַטְטוּ אֹתוֹ — [And] they embalmed him.

There is a difference of opinion in the Midrash regarding who embalmed Joseph: the court physicians or the brothers.

That he was embalmed at all was probably demanded by the royal court out of respect for the illustrious Joseph who had governed the land for as long as most people could remember.

In punishment for Joseph's having embalmed Jacob, however, the embalming was ineffective. By the time Moses retrieved Joseph's remains, only his bones were left (*Pesikta Rabbasi*).

וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאֵרוֹן בְּמִצְרַיִם — And he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

The Hebrew literally reads: "... and he was put in the coffin," that is, in the coffin Joseph had prepared for himself (*Ibn Ezra*).

— It was the coffin in which they embalmed him. The coffin was left above-ground so its identity would remain known to future generations. That is how Moses recognized it and took it out of Egypt at the Exodus [*Exod.* 13:19] (*Sforno*; *Ralbag*).¹¹

אֵרוֹן, ark; container is a delicate word for coffin. The word is used elsewhere only to describe the container holding the Tablets of the

1. Since the Torah mentions only that the coffin was in Egypt but does not speak of the burial of the coffin, the Sages in *Sotah* 13a deduce that the Egyptians lowered it into the depths of the Nile so that its waters might be blessed. (According to another opinion in the Talmud, he was buried in the royal tombs).

The Midrash cites the view that originally Joseph's coffin was buried in a field — and the field immediately became blessed. When others heard of it they stole his remains and buried it

50 years; they embalmed him and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Law, and for the collection-boxes for holy purposes (*II Kings* 12:10). In all these cases, it is not used for burial, but for receiving and safeguarding for others — the Tablets for Israel and the contribution for the Temple. Accordingly, the use of this word for 'coffin' would signify a container in which the physical casing of a human being is — temporarily — kept (*R' Hirsch*).

As *Tz'ror HaMor* notes, the use of the term *ark* for his coffin indicates Joseph's greatness in that he was like the Ark of the Covenant, lord over the land. As the Sages said, Two arks led the Israelites in the desert: the ark containing the bones of Joseph, and the Ark containing the Tables of the Covenant [the Ten Commandments]. When people questioned the propriety of a coffin near the Ark of the Covenant, the response would be: 'He whose remains are preserved in the one ark, loyally obeyed the Divine commands enshrined in the other.'

It would appear that they did not bury him, but concealed him in a coffin. Apparently they did this for one or all of the following three reasons: a) they did not think it permissible to exhume a body [even for the purpose of reburying it] once it

had been buried in the ground; b) they were afraid that if it were buried, its whereabouts would be forgotten with the passing of time; c) embalming and interment in a sarcophagus better preserves the remains than natural burial in the ground where it is a natural process for the body to disintegrate and merge with the ground from which the first human body was created. As we are taught, *For the dust returns to the ground as it was and the spirit returns to God Who gave it* [*Ecclesiastes* 12:7] (*R' Avraham b. HaRambam*).

The translation of נִישָׁם [root שָׁם], and he was placed, follows *Radak* and most commentators who perceive the word to be synonymous with נִישָׁם. *Ibn Ezra* suggests the root is שָׁם and the form נִישָׁם is in the *kal* form meaning and he [i.e., whoever was in charge] placed. Similar to this is וַיִּצֶר, He formed [root: יָצַר] in 2:7. [*Onkelos* renders similarly].

נִישָׁם is an obscure form. Above, with *Laban* (24:33) it is נִישָׁם and נִישָׁם and we took that to indicate *Laban's* vacillating behavior. Perhaps here it points to the unusual procedure — which Joseph himself had ordered for the reasons given above — of keeping a body unburied in a sarcophagus. 'It was as if Joseph had himself placed in a coffin in Egypt' (*R' Hirsch*).

The mention of in Egypt seems

in their fields so that they might be blessed. When Pharaoh heard of this, he ordered that the coffin be lowered into the Nile, the primary source of irrigation in Egypt, so that all the fields might be thereby blessed.

Another opinion [*Bereishit Rabbasi*] has it that the Egyptian sorcerers knew that because of their oath to Joseph, the children of Israel could not leave Egypt without Joseph's remains. It was they who ordered the coffin lowered into the Nile so the Israelites would never find it. When the Israelites saw this they despaired of ever being redeemed. That is why they cried נִישָׁם [and he was placed] which is homiletically to be interpreted as two words: "וְיָ, Woe, וְיָ, that he was placed into that coffin!"

Still another view is that the brothers themselves lowered Joseph's coffin into the Nile so that the Egyptians would not deify his tomb.

In any event, as we learn in *Sotah* 13a, at the Exodus Moses had to pray for a miracle to locate Joseph's remains. This will be cited אֵינָם in the comm. to *Exod.* 13:19.

superfluous. Perhaps it points to the contrast to his father's burial. His father had himself brought to Canaan immediately after his death. Joseph had no alternative [see v. 25 s.v. **וַיִּהְיֶה**] but to be kept in a coffin until he could be brought to Canaan (*R' Hirsch*).

... The presence in Egypt of Joseph's coffin symbolized that his spirit would remain with his children during the hardships awaiting them in Egypt. On this note of moral comfort, *Genesis* comes to an end ... The end of the Patriarchal epoch is not a conclusion, but a beginning. The nucleus of the future "nation of Priests" has been created and firmly established. Though a period of suffering and trial is about to begin, the nation will emerge from it with its spiritual

strength formed to endure for all time (*R' Munk*).

According to the Masoretic note appearing at the end of the *Sidrah*, there are 85 verses in the *Sidrah*, numerically corresponding to the mnemonic פִּיהַ אֵל פִּיהַ [literally 'mouth to mouth' (each word פִּיהַ equals 85)]. This alludes to the theme of our *Sidrah*, in which Jacob spoke to his children, relating to them the blessings that would form the core of their mission for all time. In the mnemonic of our *Sidrah*, *Harav David Feinstein*, who interprets these Masoretic notes, finds support for his contention that they are meant not only as convenient memory devices but to encapsulate the message of the *Sidrah*. If nothing were intended except a reminder that there are 85 verses, it would have been sufficient to use only the word פִּיהַ, mouth or פִּה, here — but this would tell us nothing about the *sidrah* itself, therefore it was expanded to פִּיהַ אֵל פִּיהַ, mouth to mouth.

The *Haftarah* begins with *I Kings* 2:1 **וַיִּקְרָב וַיְמִי כֹרֶךְ**.

Most Chumashim conclude with the following note:

The Book of Bereishis contains 1,534 verses. The mnemonic is אֶ"ר לִי"ד [the א with a dot over it = 1,000; the final ר = 500; ל = 30; ד = 4];

The phrase **וְעַל חֶרֶבְךָ חַתִּיָּה**, and by your sword you shall live [27:40] marks the midpoint of the Book;

It contains 12 *Parshiyos* [weekly portions], the mnemonic being שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם [Exod. 3:15]: *This is My name forever/for concealment*;

Its *Sidros* [smaller Masoretic divisions according to the Triennial cycle once in in *Eretz Yisrael*] number 43, the mnemonic being: בְּרִיךְ יְיָהּ [27:33]: *He too, shall be blessed*;

Its chapters number 50, the mnemonic being: לִי חֲנוּנִי לִי [Isaiah 33:2]: *O HASHEM be gracious to us, in You we have hoped*;

The total number of פְּתוּחוֹת, traditional 'open' line divisions between Masoretic chapters in Torah Scrolls, is 43; while the סְתוּמוֹת, 'closed' smaller spaced divisions, number 48, totaling 91 chapters. The mnemonic is צִ"א אָמְרָה וְכָל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בְּרַגְלֶיךָ [Exod. 11:8]: *Go out, you and all the people who follow you*.

נשלם סדר ויחי ונשלם ספר בראשית בעזרת האל ח ז ק

Meir Zlotowitz

Sivan, 5741/June 1981

Brooklyn, New York